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REVIEWS

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SOUL RIOT!

AMY WINEHOUSE
THE GLORY & THE HEARTACHE

GRATEFUL DEAD
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THE JAM
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On the cover:
Nirvana by
AJ Barratt
Paul McCartney
by Michael Ochs
Archives/Getty
Images

THESE days – inevitably, perhaps – many of our perceptions about Nirvana are filtered through the death of Kurt Cobain. An industry has gathered around his memory, truffling for clues in old interviews or in the hiss and howl of *In Utero*, that has essentially detracted from happier times in the band’s existence. Specifically, the thrill of Nirvana’s ascent with *Nevermind*. Everything seemed to move incredibly fast during autumn 1991 – there was an exhilarating mix of trepidation and excitement at their shows that year, a shared joy at the speed and scale of Nirvana’s success. *The Word*, *Top Of The Pops*, the stage at Kilburn National Ballroom and more were theirs for the taking.

All this is recalled with warmth and intimacy by Krist Novoselic, Dave Grohl and Butch Vig in this month’s cover story. There’s also an oral history of the band’s 1991 UK shows that provides compelling evidence for the chaos and brilliance of that tour – and happy memories if, like me, you saw them live during that period.

These were fun times for Nirvana, full of optimism and the ethos of self-determination familiar from American bands of that period. We hear about poorly heated rehearsal spaces in Tacoma, a 1,000-mile drive from Seattle to Los Angeles, an unexpected admiration for the Bay City Rollers and how, 30 years on, Dave and Krist view the madness around their inexorable rise. The scale of their ambitions, we can reveal, was to earn enough money to buy an apartment each...

Elsewhere, it’s another hugely eclectic issue: Sly Stone, Laura Nyro, Amy Winehouse, Grateful Dead, Rodney Crowell, Angélique Kidjo, Sparks, Alice Coltrane, The Jam, Roy Harper, Altın Gün, Rodrigo Amarante, Will Sergeant, Arooj Aftab, PJ Harvey, Gruff Rhys and some bloke called Paul McCartney.

Hope you enjoy it – as ever, let us know what you think: letters@uncut.co.uk.

Michael Bonner, Editor. Follow me on Twitter @michaelbonner

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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT

FEATURING... Will Sergeant | Ellen Foley | Roy Harper | Arooj Aftab

Young ideas

Previously unseen photos of **The Jam** show **Weller** and co's impatient evolution

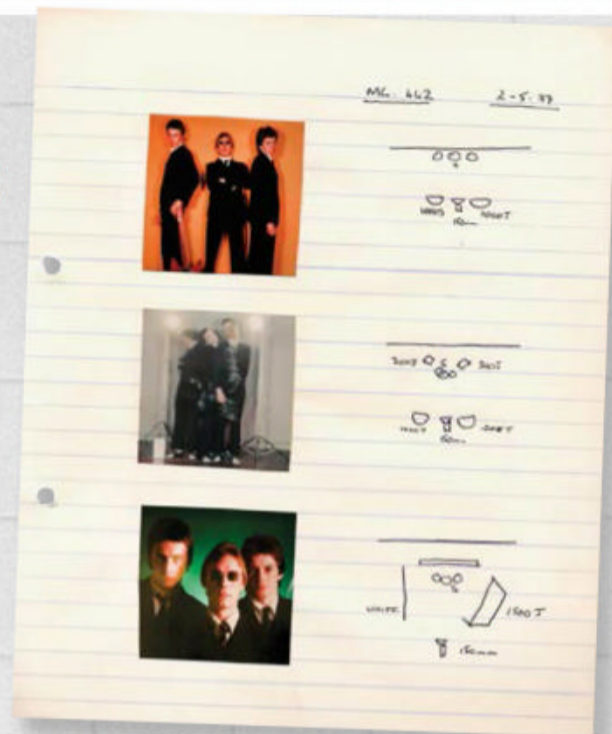
As punk swept the nation in 1977 and '78, time was moving so fast, The Jam's regular sleeve photographer Martyn Goddard forgot he'd amassed stacks of fascinating outtakes from those now-iconic shoots at his tiny studio on Kensington Church Street. "Every day I was photographing a different band," says Goddard. "I did Sham 69, The Cure, I did a band called The Jolt... although the shoot before The Jam was Acker Bilk!" The sessions were "done very quickly, and once the art department had pulled the picture [for the sleeve], the rest of the negatives went into my files in the loft. I'd forgotten all about them."

Despite the rapid turnover of new wave hopefuls, The Jam – whom Goddard first snapped for the sleeve of *In The City* – stood out. "They were very switched on, image-wise. You knew they were going to go places because the look was there, the attitude was there – and they worked well with us." What struck Goddard about the young Paul Weller was not so much a camera-hogging charisma, but a quiet determination and openness to collaboration. "All the time I worked with Paul, he seemed quite shy. If you take Jimmy Pursey, he controlled the shoot. But Paul was part of the team and he didn't strut around imposing his will – it was a team effort."

By May 1978, and the shoot for double-A single "David Watts"/"A' Bomb In Wardour Street" [opposite page], the band "were really enjoying themselves", says Goddard. "The clothes had begun to get looser, more casual. They were very confident, whereas on the first shoots there was obviously a slight apprehension. There's a much lighter air

about it. And Paul is at last in the middle!" © SAM RICHARDS

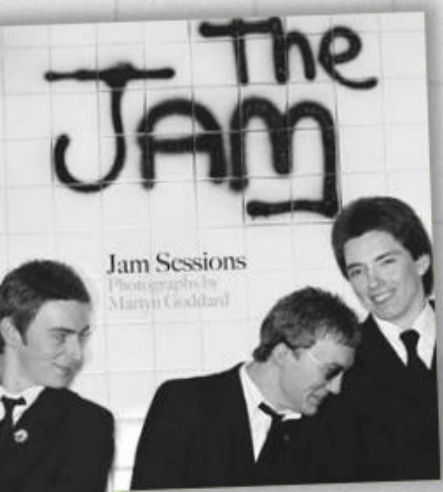
Jam Sessions: Photographs By Martyn Goddard is published by Ormond Yard Press in June



"They were very switched on, image-wise"

MARTYN GODDARD

MARTYN GODDARD



Time for a change:
The Jam posing for
the cover of "David
Watts"; (opposite)
Weller during the *In*
The City shoot, and a
page from Martyn
Goddard's notebook



INSTANT KARMA

"It's two lives": Will Sergeant (second left) with the Bunnymen in 1981



Sergeant minor and (below) the heavily fringed "average divvy"



World of Echo

Spare us the clutter! How a house clearout led to an illuminating early-years memoir for Bunnymen guitarist Will Sergeant

THIS is my bedroom," says Will Sergeant, gesturing around him for the benefit of the Zoom interview. "It was full of shit until yesterday. Loads of old copies of the *NME* and that. Pictures all over the place. So me and me daughter did a big clearout. We've got 10 bags of shite in the car ready to go to the tip..."

These "10 bags of shite" are, it transpires, the leftovers from Sergeant's exhaustive trawl through the early history of Echo And The Bunnymen. For the last few years, the guitarist has been working on a memoir, *Bunnyman* – both a coming-of-age story set during the '60s and '70s, full of schoolboy larks and family drama in suburban Liverpool, and also a story about Sergeant's evolving relationship

with music. "It's two different lives," agrees Sergeant. "My life as an average divvy in Liverpool – and then all of a sudden, a Bunnyman. For a lot of people, music gives them something to focus on. In my case, a lot of that was to do with the lads over the road, the Mazenko boys. They were a bit older than me. Through them I started collecting records. There was always a trade going on: 'I'll give you my *Sticky Fingers* for your *Wranglers*!'"

From enterprising deals with his neighbours, Sergeant graduated to gigs. He writes vividly about a feisty double bill of Slade and Status Quo at Liverpool Stadium in 1972, Led Zeppelin at Earls Court in 1975 and Bowie at Bingley Hall, Stafford, in 1978. This musical education leads, inevitably, to *Eric's* – where Sergeant finds himself in the midst of Liverpool's emerging post-punk scene, "desperate to shake off the shadow of The Beatles that pervades every aspect of Liverpool life", as he writes in the book. "I did an

interview once and I said, 'I hate The Beatles,'" he remembers. "Of course, I don't hate The Beatles – but we were sick of hearing about them. It does your head in. Eric's was definitely about breaking away from that."

Eric's was, of course, where Sergeant first ran into Ian McCulloch – referred to in the book as 'Macul'. "I'd seen him in the club a couple of times but I'd never paid much attention to him. He looked a bit Bowie-ish – but then, everyone did back then." The book captures something of the tentative, early magic around such propitious encounters, with Sergeant detailing McCulloch's marathon bus journeys every Thursday across Liverpool so the two could jam in the back room of Sergeant's family home in Melling.

"I don't hate The Beatles, but we were sick of hearing about them"

By 1979 the definitive Bunnymen lineup was in place, with Les Pattinson on bass and an 18-year-old Pete DeFreitas on drums: "He had a very hippie vibe to him. He used to walk around the flat in the nude, he didn't give a shit."

That's where the story ends, however – for now. "I hope to do two or three books," reveals Sergeant. "I want to get to *Heaven Up Here* and *Crocodiles* and the first American tours. Those were a real eye-opener. I hadn't been anywhere before! Then suddenly I was thrown into this maelstrom of interesting people and places."

Meanwhile, Sergeant's day job beckons, as live Bunnymen dates gradually start appearing in the diary. "Trouble is, I haven't played

much for about a year," he confides. "Your fingers go dead hard when you play guitar for a long time, but now it kills. I don't even know if I can play the guitar any more..."

© MICHAEL BONNER

***Bunnyman: A Memoir* is published by Little, Brown on July 13**



“I always felt like an outsider”

Best known for singing with Meat Loaf and The Clash, now **Ellen Foley** is happy to “create my own thing”

“I WENT from the theatre to appearing on this huge hit record and then on to The Clash, thrown into a whole other milieu which really had nothing to do with me. As a kid from St Louis, what did I know about the struggle under Margaret Thatcher? The trajectory was crazy.”

Singer and actor Ellen Foley is reflecting on her formative years of the late '70s and early '80s. Having initially sought a career on Broadway, she'd toured with the *National Lampoon* show where she met Meat Loaf and Jim Steinman. The upshot was a starring role on 1977's mega-platinum *Bat Out Of Hell*, with Foley taking the powerhouse female lead on the epic “Paradise By The Dashboard Light”.

Before long she was mixing with the likes of Ian Hunter, Blue Öyster Cult and The Clash, including 1980's “Hitsville UK”, a duet with her then boyfriend, Mick Jones. A year earlier, Hunter and Mick Ronson had co-produced Foley's solo debut, *Night Out*. She admits to having a crush on the ex-Spider From Mars. “It wasn't like I wanted him, it was more like [clasp her hands in front of her], ‘Oh my God, look at Ronson!’ she laughs. “I was a



27-year-old kid and his playing on my record was just unbelievable.”

Allusions to Foley's past are sprinkled throughout *Fighting Words*, her first solo effort in eight years. The bulk of the songs, tailored to fit what Foley calls “the peaks and valleys of my history”, were written by longtime ally Paul Foglino. The pair met in theatre in 2005.

“I refer to Paul as my weird little brother, because we've had a creative relationship for so long,” she says. “I feel totally comfortable with him, like family. I think this album is really to do with resilience,

bouncing back and growing up.”

Typical of its tough-rocking, R&B-slanted approach is “I'm Just Happy To Be Here”, on which Foley trades vocals with another Meat Loaf-affiliated singer, Karla DeVito. Then there's a cover of “Heaven Can Wait”, which acts as a poignant tribute to the recently departed Steinman. “He was really one of the funniest people ever,” recalls Foley.

“In the studio doing *Bat Out Of Hell*, Jim and I were going, ‘This should be like *West Side Story*!’ Todd [Rundgren, producer] was like, ‘If you don't shut up I'm throwing you both out of the studio. What the fuck!’ But Todd understood what he was about. Jim would say, ‘Extreme? I started extreme!’ He used to call me the rock'n'roll Maria Callas.”

Another highlight of *Fighting Words* is “This Won't Last Forever”, which contains a

“Jim Steinman used to call me the rock'n'roll Maria Callas”

veiled reference to her time with Jones and co. In addition to singing on *Sandinista!* and *Combat Rock*, Foley recorded her second LP, 1981's *Spirit Of St Louis*, with The

Clash as backing band. Producer Jones also co-wrote half a dozen of the songs with Joe Strummer. “It was all happening at once,” Foley explains. “The whole thing was cool and there was a kind of communal spirit in the way they made records. It was exciting for a while, but I always felt like an outsider. It was hard for me. I put myself into somebody else's world instead of developing my own. That's why I'm

happy being able to create my own thing these days.” **ROBHUGHES**

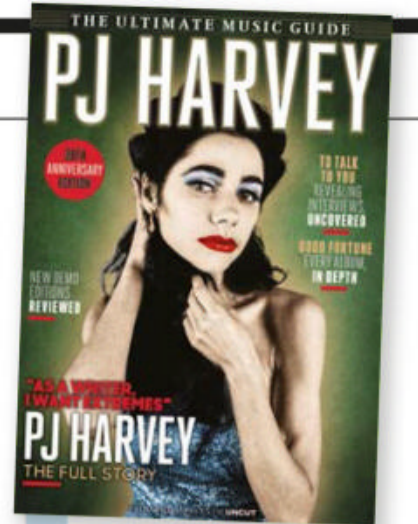
Fighting Words is out on August 6 via Urban Noise Music



A night out with Ian Hunter and squeeze Mick Jones, 1980



Roy Harper, in 2021: "I was taking selfies in the bathroom mirror at 4am"



A QUICK ONE

Celebrations are in order this month. As **PJ Harvey** marks 30 years since her debut single, "Dress", we reveal our Deluxe, expanded *Ultimate Music Guide* to all things Polly Jean. This updated edition includes new reviews of the recent demo releases alongside classic archival encounters from *Melody Maker*, *NME* and *Uncut*...

A Man And His Myths



As **Roy Harper** celebrates a significant birthday, he looks back on his masterpiece *Stormcock* – which turns 50 this year – and forward to his next album. "Where do I stop?" he asks

"TIME is that funny thing. I was eight only yesterday, so how real can time really be? Well, I don't want to get into that..."

On the line from his home in County Cork, Roy Harper is, in his usual ruminative manner, pondering the milestone of his 80th birthday on June 12. He had booked the Royal Albert Hall for what he'd have called "The Last Gig", but Covid put paid to that.

"The world is going to stay changed," he says. "But being 80 and mobile is a good place to be. It's fun too – I've been telling the odd person I'm 80, and you usually get, 'You're 80?! I don't believe you!' Although the young don't see you unless you stick out like a sore thumb, which of course I can do."

It's something of a marvel that Harper has endured to his ninth decade, having been born with a lung condition that put him in St Thomas' Hospital in 1972. "I asked the doctor how long he thought I had to live, and he told me about six or seven years. It had been a crazy year to be honest; the excesses were extreme and that's what landed me there, but it was good because we found out about [*the condition*]. I changed my regime then, because I wanted to live as long as I could."

Those excesses came in the wake of the lacklustre label and media reception to 1971's *Stormcock*, his now-legendary record that celebrated its 50th anniversary last month and has been rediscovered over the decades by a new generation of listeners including Joanna Newsom and Jim O'Rourke.

"*Stormcock* was where I started, but it's also where I really stopped as

"I've been telling the odd person I'm 80 and you usually get, 'You're 80? I don't believe you!'"

well," he explains. "I drove myself on on the ashes of *Stormcock*, while it was limping on with zero publicity. That particular career can be timed by the day, from the beginning of the recording of *Stormcock* to being onstage with Pink Floyd at Knebworth in 1975 – that is one career right there. Everything I wrote and recorded after that belongs to a different world.

"I know *Stormcock* is some kind of masterpiece," he adds, singling out

engineer John Leckie and manager Peter Jenner for particular credit. "Pete's such a good man. He was the go-between, trying to balance the 'mad' artiste and the completely rational record company. It was actually the other way around? Yeah, who knew!"

Harper has been working on the follow-up to 2013's *Man & Myth* in recent years, though the pandemic has slowed his progress. Being vulnerable to Covid, he found his world shrinking and an obsession with the American elections taking up much of his time. "My routine was getting weirder," he says, "taking selfies in the bathroom mirror alone and silent at 4am with the beard growing! But even throughout that I was committing ideas to paper and screen all the time – there's literally far too much to do."

The enforced break has also helped Harper's hands, damaged by decades of fingerpicking, and recently he's been considering a high-quality livestream. His thoughts concentrated by occasional weed-smoking, he's also now in the middle of writing five new songs, which he believes are so strong they might squeeze out the new material he already had.

"That's the next problem, where do I stop?" he laughs, excited by the possibilities. "I'm the old soldier who'll never make it past lieutenant, but he's still commander-in-chief of the million daydreams he's been lugging around on his back for an eternity now." **© TOMPINNOCK**



And another anniversary: onsale on June 21, **The Beatles Miscellany And Atlas** celebrates 60 years of the Fabs' recording professionally. It's a left-field history of The Beatles told in graphs, stats, maps, minutiae, seating plans, miscellaneous observations and their entire UK discography.

Although postponed last year, **The Docn' Roll Film Festival** are screening some of the films from their 2020 programme during June and July – as well as two new releases. You can find full details at docnrollfestival.com/films, but stand by for premieres of **Don't Go Gentle: A Film About Idles** and **Punk The Capitol** – both reviewed elsewhere in this issue – as well as **Other, Like Me - The Oral History Of Coum & Throbbing Gristle** and **Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And Legendary Tapes**.

The Beach Boys celebrate one of their most creatively abundant periods with a new boxset, **Feel Flows - The Sunflower & Surf's Up Sessions 1969-1971**. It includes 108 unreleased tracks, and you can hear the mouth-watering taster, "Big Sur", over on uncut.co.uk.

UNCUT PLAYLIST

On the stereo this month...



JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ

Local Valley CITY SLANG

"We can't know for sure what's next/But we're in this together". Surprisingly rousing tunes from the Gothenburg troubadour, in English, Spanish and Swedish.

MEGA BOG

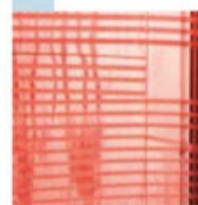
Life, And Another PARADISE OF BACHELORS

Recorded in studios up and down the US West Coast, Erin Birgy's fifth is a dense, fantastical odyssey, touching on folk-rock, '80s pop, exotica, sci-fi and dialectical behaviour therapy.

THE SMILE

"Opposites" UNRELEASED

"I'm quitting unexpectedly..." One of several ace, knotty grooves unveiled by Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood's exciting new splinter group during the Glasto livestream.



LUGGAGE

Happiness EP HUSKY PANTS

Continuing his mission to revive Chicago post-rock, the next release on Ryley Walker's label – following his own majestic

Course In Fable – is this EP of grinding Slint-style claustrophobia.

JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN

I Would Not Live Always RIVERLEA

Double tin whistle and tape loops! Revelatory new takes on English and Irish folk songs in the manner of Sam Amidon.

RICHARD & DUNCAN PINHAS

Sources BAMBALAM

Heldon's space-rock skipper celebrates 70 years on – but not always of – this earth by summoning a typically immense cosmic blowout with his son Duncan.

COCHEMEA

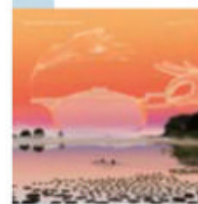
Vol 2: Baca Sewa DAPTONE

The Dap-Kings' sax man lets rip over deep, percussion-heavy jams, tipping the hat to African, Latin and Native American rhythmic traditions.

BADGE EPOCH

Scroll TELEPHONE EXPLOSION

Enjoyably discombobulating 90-minute braindump from the artist formerly known as Slim Twig, running the gamut from musique concrète to diseased jazz-funk.



SYNERGETIC VOICE ORCHESTRA

Mios MÉTRON

First-ever vinyl release for this beautiful 1989 album from Satie-inspired pianist

Yumiko Morioka and her scratch New Age pop ensemble.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Journeys In Modern Jazz: Britain (1965-72) DECCA

Find out exactly why collectors pay silly money for OGLPs by Michael Garrick, Don Rendell, Mike Taylor et al. Seriously cool modal jazz by limeys in cardies.



I'M NEW HERE

Arooj Aftab

Aftab: making arresting music after "significant life events"

Brooklyn-based singer drawing on ambient jazz and Pakistani love ballads to make one of the year's most stunning albums

A ROOJ AFTAB is laughing when we speak, recovering from being chased around her Brooklyn backyard by a pair of violet-coloured carpenter bees. "They go around in pairs and they terrorise you if you're smoking a cigarette," she explains. "They're humongous!"

The singer has now called New York home for more than 10 years, but the city still has the capacity to surprise her. Born in Saudi Arabia but raised in Pakistan from the age of 11, she was 21 when she left Lahore to study at Berklee College Of Music in Boston. "I had to make a significant sacrifice at a very young age," she says, listing the relationships she had to leave behind when heading to America. "Not only relationships to human beings but to sense and places and streets and bodies of water. And that was really hard."

Now 36, her music still links her to Lahore. This was clear on her 2014 debut, the "very meditative" *Bird Under Water*, and on its more electronic follow-up *Siren Islands*. And it is evident, too, on this year's *Vulture Prince* – an album she had intended to "have more of an edge" than its predecessors, but that suddenly "changed gears after some significant life events".

The description feels like an understatement for the short stretch of months in which a friend committed suicide and Aftab's younger brother passed away. "It was really, really just ridiculous for me," she says. "That was the first time that anyone that I knew very well, and loved and cared about, died. You think you're going to grow old with these people and then

suddenly, really unnaturally, really abruptly, that relationship ends. And you're not even really grieving, you're just like, 'Where are they?'"

She cancelled all gigs. "I couldn't really sing," she says, "because a lot of the grief sat in my throat, and

that was really scary and surprising to me." But eventually she realised that music would be part of her grieving process. Assembling a group of players, she stripped all rhythmic instruments from the songs. "No drum set, nothing, and that opened it up a little bit more. It gave it this breath, because we were breathing the rhythm. It's not that the music is devoid of any tempo, but when we took away the obvious rhythmic structures, all of us were holding the rhythm."

The result is a stunning record, a collection of ghazals that hark back to Aftab's Pakistani roots, redrawn to feel contemporary and arresting. "Ghazals are basically love ballads," she says. "Whether it's about the loss of a lover or the desire for a lover, it's these limbo-ish [states]. They're funny and beautiful, which I love, and they're open to interpretation – they're so radical in their way."

Vulture Prince also draws on poems by friends, bringing in harp and violin, the Brazilian guitarist Badi Assad and the multi-instrumentalist Shahzad Ismaily. One track unexpectedly sets a Rumi poem against a reggae backing, with the hope that it will be "a nice refresher for people that Rumi is not just to be used in the yoga industry". It is strange, says Aftab, to look back – to consider the record she set out to make, and the record it became. "But *Vulture Prince* and I were able to kind of hold hands through the whole thing, and to come out of the inferno." **LAURA BARTON**

Vulture Prince is out now on New Amsterdam

I'M YOUR FAN



"Arooj Aftab's voice and musical arrangements interlock and complement each other stunningly well. The ethereal, regal quality of her music is uniquely her own" **Yasmin Williams**

FREE
CD

Entertain Us

15 tracks of the month's best music

1 MEGA BOG
Butterfly

This highlight from Erin Birgy's new album *Life, And Another* starts us off in a wild mood this month, with the now-Los-Angeles-based singer and songwriter taking us on a grooving flight of fancy into humid rhythms, unhinged cabaret vocals, furious guitar and free-jazz skronk.

2 RODNEY CROWELL
Triage

Here's the title track of songwriter and producer Crowell's new record, crafted throughout the pandemic in 2020. As with the rest of its songs, "Triage" deals tenderly with matters of love, both in the romantic sense and wider. "Is each song in service of the spirit of Universal Love?" says producer Dan Kobler. "If not, it had to go."

3 JUNI HABEL
Run Dry

The Norwegian singer-songwriter's album *All Ears* is a gentle, floating thing with hidden riptides, reminiscent of Vashti Bunyan and Julie Byrne. "Run Dry" is the perfect distillation of her sound, as propulsive picking is pushed along by sawing strings.

4 RODRIGO AMARANTE
Tango

Drama is the LA-based Brazilian's second solo album after a long career of collaborations and reinventions, and it's his most satisfying to date, a lilting mixed-language stew of South American and global rhythms which also recalls the later work of his friend Devendra Banhart. It's our Album Of The Month on page 16.

5 THE GRID/FRIPP
Milkwood

Robert Fripp, David Ball and Richard Norris have teamed up for *Leviathan*, a hypnotic mix of Frippertronics and electronic beats and ambience. "Milkwood", perhaps one of its most subtle moments, is also one of the album's peaks.

6 CHARLIE PARR
On Listening To Robert Johnson

Last Of The Better Days Ahead is the latest long-playing transmission from the Minnesota guitarist and singer-songwriter. This is raw, ragged and beautiful Americana, with Parr examining memory, his past and his country's own existential battles.

7 YOLA
Stand For Myself

With Dan Auerbach returning on production duties, *Stand For Myself*, the second



Yola

album from Bristol's Yola, is another very fine slice of vintage rock and soul. Check out the title track and read our lead review on page 32.

8 THE BLACK ANGELS
Don't Fall Down

Light In The Attic's excellent new compilation, *May The Circle Remain Unbroken: A Tribute To Roky Erickson*, is reviewed on page 35, and here's one of its deepest, loveliest tracks, a murky, Optigan-led version of this Elevators classic by Austin's Black Angels.

9 DOT ALLISON
Cue The Tears

Almost 30 years after One Dove's debut album, Dot Allison has made what might be her best solo record, *Heart-Shaped Scars*. Rippling with piano, Mellotron and Allison's own, singular vocals, "Cue The Tears" is a crepuscular triumph, understated and gradually deepening.

10 LOS LOBOS
Native Son

The group's new album, *Native*

Sons, is a covers record recorded in tribute to Los Angeles; here's the sole Lobos-written cut on it, a gorgeous and soul-influenced paean to the City Of Angels, with some fine gospel-tinged organ and brass.

11 LUMP
Animal

Laura Marling and Mike Lindsay's collaboration has proved a surprisingly fruitful one, as demonstrated by their second album *Animal*, reviewed in depth on page 20. The title track here encapsulates the Technicolor mix of pop thrills and freeform experimentation at work.

12 JOHN MURRY
Die Kreutzer Sonata

The Stars Are God's Bullet Holes, Murry's third album, pairs the singer-songwriter with PJ Harvey producer John Parish for a delicately brutal tapestry of soul-baring lyrics and frazzled, cut-up backings, which, while they recall Lambchop or Eels, show Murry very much has his own thing going. Check out the review on page 22.



Lump



John Murry

13 AROOJ AFTAB
Suroor

The New York-based singer and songwriter has channelled grief and suffering into her new album, *Vulture Prince*, a powerful mix of musical influences from both the east and west. The result, as on "Suroor", is never polite or scholarly, though, but painfully real. Aftab speaks on page nine.

14 JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN
Shallow Brown

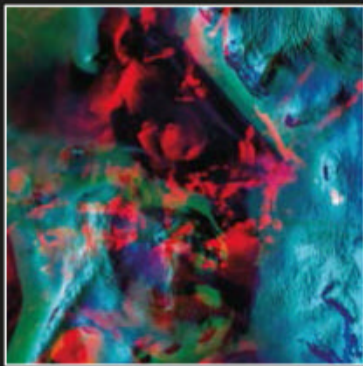
The latest signing to Rough Trade's River Lea subsidiary, Dublin's Flynn matches traditional songs with tape loops, acoustic guitars and electronics for a sound that's at once impossibly ancient and stunningly modern. *I Would Not Live Always* is reviewed in depth on page 34.

15 AMARO FREITAS
Nascimento

Hailing from Recife in northern Brazil, Freitas plays piano-based jazz, backed by drums and bass – yet he turns this traditional setup into something stunning, new and vibrant on his third album *Sankofa*, as this tranquil track proves. 🎧



CARGO COLLECTIVE



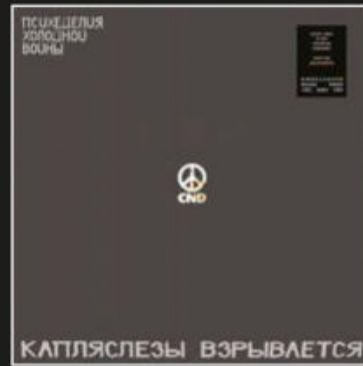
LUCY GOOCH
RAIN'S BREAK EP
 FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

Lucy Gooch's music is a beautiful ethereal fog, like hearing a subliminal echo of Kate Bush on a fading tape loop. 'Rain's Break' follows the much-touted 'Rushing' EP. "The moment is short, but Lucy Gooch's music makes it last forever" NPR.



THE HOLY FAMILY
THE HOLY FAMILY
 ROCKET RECORDINGS LP / CD

A haunting, fog-draped voyage of kosmische polyrhythms and psych folk wonder – a stellar kaleidoscopic vision from a new band featuring members of Guapo, The Utopia Strong, Coil, Chrome Hoof etc.



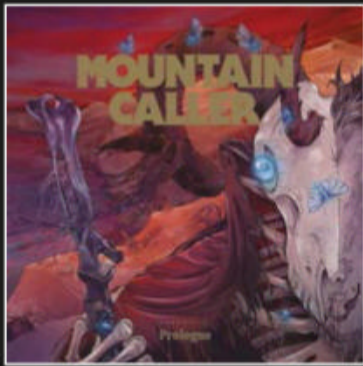
JULIAN COPE & THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
COLD WAR PSYCHEDELIA
 HEAD HERITAGE LP

Exhilarating! Dynamic! 1982 music from the Death Throes of Liverpool's maddest band. Also, 1989 Head-On reflections in spoken word & breath-taking Post-Punk sound collage. Clad in appropriately intriguing packaging? U-Betcha!



THE MOUNTAIN GOATS
DARK IN HERE
 MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

12 songs for singing in caves, bunkers, foxholes, and secret spaces beneath the floorboards.



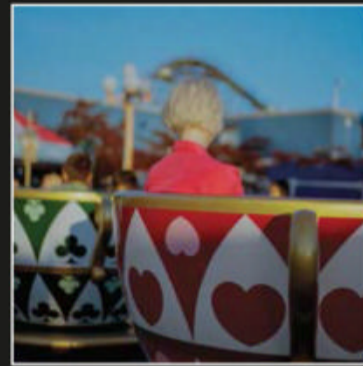
MOUNTAIN CALLER
CHRONICLE: PROLOGUE EP
 NEW HEAVY SOUNDS 12"

Mountain Caller return with a new EP. The conceptual prequel to their debut album, showcasing the band's dynamic mix of heavy, expansive and progressive metal.



PART CHIMP
DROOL

With a skewed melodic skill to match their mighty potency, Part Chimp will demolish your house, but you'll cheerfully thank them for it afterwards. A joy through vacuum-tubed catharsis.



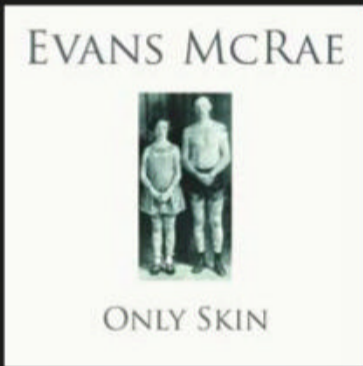
HOLLIE KENNIFF
THE QUIET DRIFT
 WESTERN VINYL LP / CD

An ambient gallery of cloudlike synths and wordless vocals. Bleep says it's "some of the nicest ambient composition we've heard in a while" RYRL Grouper, Julianna Barwick, Malibu, Cocteau Twins.



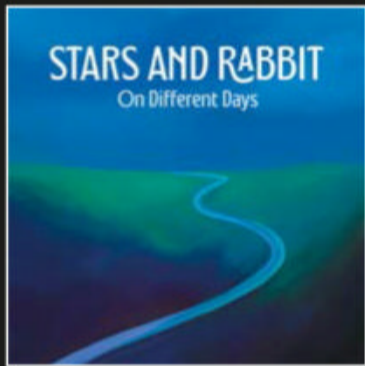
CEDRIC BURNSIDE
I BE TRYING
 SINGLE LOCK RECORDS LP / CD

The blues is music for all time, past, present, and future and few artists simultaneously exemplify those multiple temporal moments of the genre like North Mississippi's Cedric Burnside.



EVANS MCRAE
ONLY SKIN
 E&M RECORDS CD

Only Skin is the debut album from Evans McRae, a new collaboration from seasoned song-writers Tom McRae & Lowri Evans. This stunning & eclectic suite of emotionally sophisticated songs shows a new side to both these much-loved artists.



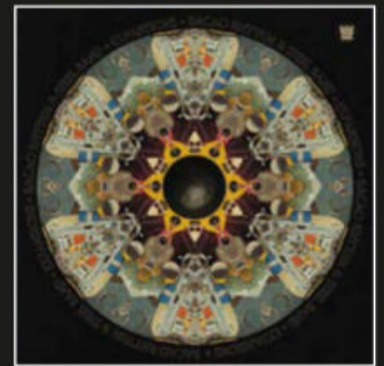
STARS AND RABBIT
ON DIFFERENT DAYS
 TRAPPED ANIMAL LP

The Indonesian duo - huge in their home country – first release with UK's Trapped Animal, a trippy indie-folk wander through the last year. An album full of hope. FFO Cardigans, Les Paul Mary Ford.



JODI
BLUE HERON
 SOOPER RECORDS LP / CD

On their debut LP Blue Heron, songwriter Nick Levine's soft-spoken "queer country" songs deliver a series of intimate moments capable of turning your inner world upside down with a whisper.



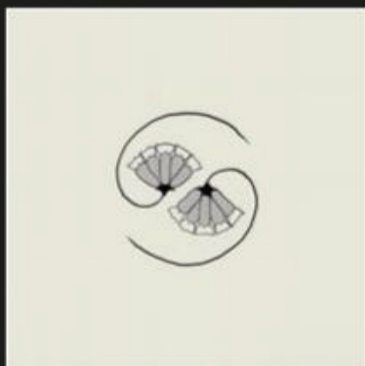
BACAO RHYTHM & STEEL BAND
EXPANSIONS

On their 3rd album, aptly titled Expansions, BRSB are back. Covering songs that span genres & range from mega hits to album cuts, they make them their own with their unique approach to the traditional steel pans of Trinidad & Tobago.



THE QUIREBOYS
A BIT OF WHAT YOU FANCY
 (30TH ANNIVERSARY)
 OFF YER ROCKA LP / CD

Re-recorded version of this classic album to mark the albums 30th Anniversary -. Features new Gypsy Rock n' Roll versions of 'I Don't Love You Anymore' and 'Mayfair' plus two additional live tracks.



GOSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR
G_D'S PEE AT STATE'S END
 CONSTELLATION LP / CD

GYBE returns with a soundtrack for our times: two riveting side-lengths of noise-drenched post-rock spittle and grit, two shorter elegiac companion pieces. Deluxe vinyl is 180gLP + 10" in thermograph gatefold.



BRAINSTORY
RIPE

Produced by Brainstory, mixed by Leon Michels and recorded during the thick of the Covid lockdown. Ripe pulls from Jazz, Hip Hop, 70s Funk, 60s Soul, and life in Southern California in the year 2021.



WHITE FLOWERS
DAY BY DAY

Day By Day is the dark-hued dreampop debut from Preston duo, White Flowers, recorded in an abandoned textile mill and produced with Doves' Gez Williams.

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**“Chasing the
humour in
conversation is
a precursor to
writing songs”**

Crowell today:
still digging for
those diamonds
in the dirt

“When the guns come out, get outta there!”

AN AUDIENCE WITH **RODNEY CROWELL**

WHEN Rodney Crowell picks up the phone, he's sitting exactly where you imagine him to be – on his back porch in Tennessee, guitar in hand, working on a song. “I live on top of a hill, surrounded by forest,” he says, describing the scene. “I’m looking at a mature weeping cedar of Lebanon, a couple of cedrus diadoras, some Japanese maple, some ancient cedar trees and an early spring vegetable garden. There’s a pool of water that’s reflecting the sun and a hummingbird just came by a moment ago. It’s pretty idyllic, I would say.”

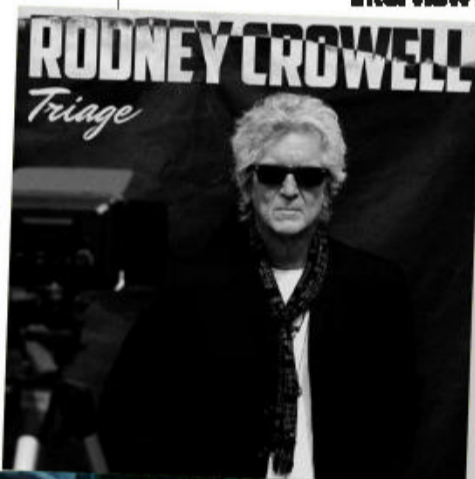
Yet that doesn’t mean the songs always flow. “I’ve learned, after years and years of doing this, that inspiration is the byproduct of dedication and hard work. In my twenties, there were bursts of inspiration that came like lightning in a jar. But as time goes on, it’s a matter of finding new things to say and new ways to say them.”

At 70, Crowell remains dedicated to that mission. His new album *Triage* is probably the most urgent and socially conscious collection of songs he’s ever recorded – “more humanitarian than political”, he insists – and lockdown, while freighted with sadness at the loss of a close relative, has been productive.

“While I was isolated at home I wrote a bunch of songs and recorded them on this little 8-track,” he says, “just for the enjoyment of smashin’ something down. Maybe there’s something in there that I might wanna release. I certainly had fun.”

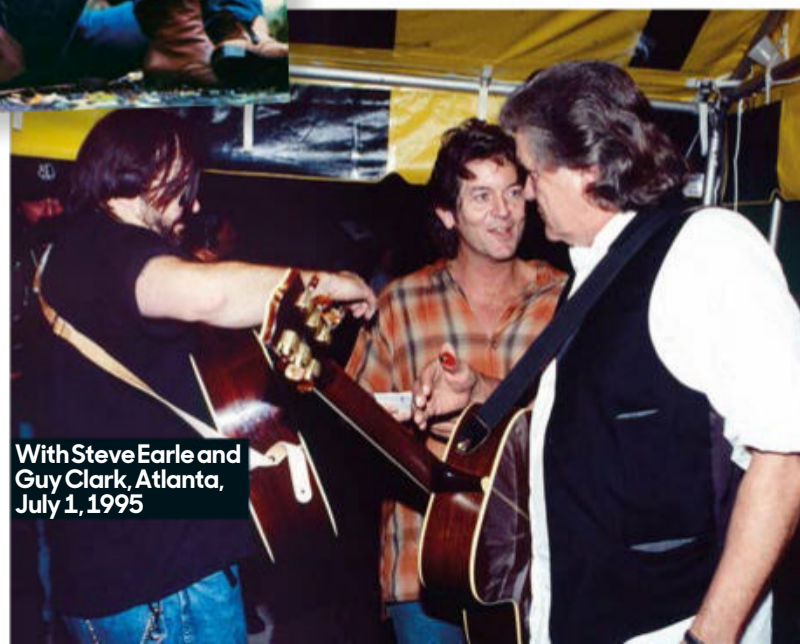
The Americana star on wild times with Guy and Townes, the generosity of Johnny Cash and the sex life of the Tennessee cicadas

Interview by SAM RICHARDS



How has your songwriting changed since your early days writing for Emmylou Harris, Rosanne Cash and others? Do you write more for yourself now? *Joanne Hurley, via email*
Yes. Mind you, I never wrote for someone else. I learned early on that that’s putting the cart before the horse. In my early days I was in a circle of songwriters with Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt and Mickey

Newbury. Steve Earle and myself were young apprentices, in a way. And one of the first things you learn is, you don’t write a song for any other reason than to find the truth of what that song can be. So all the songs that Emmy recorded, or Waylon Jennings or any of them, I never wrote the songs specifically for them – I



With Steve Earle and Guy Clark, Atlanta, July 1, 1995

wrote to give a voice to the song, and the good ones got recorded. But having said that, at the beginning of this century I made a record called *The Houston Kid* and I decided that from then on I was going to write for myself. I still use the same process of trying to find the truth of the song, but I do it with a singular sensibility now, rather than a broad stroke.

Your new single [“Something Has To Change”] has a great trombone solo. How do you decide which other musicians to work with and what you want them to do? *Jack Everingham, Norfolk*

We tried a couple of guitar solos and I felt nothing was new. Several of us took a swing at it, but it was uninspired, y’know? I thought, ‘How about a trumpet?’ Then I decided it wasn’t round enough and it occurred to me: ‘Ah, trombone’. Dan Kobler, my co-producer, said, “I know a guy that can kill it.” So we sent Ray Mason [of *Antibalas*] the track. I talked to him over the phone and said, “Think of Louis Armstrong – put the old stopper in the end of your trombone and play the blues”, and that’s the solo he sent back to us. I couldn’t have been more delighted. He took my direction and made it his own.

What was the first song you wrote that you knew you had to record? *Haroula Rose, via email*

The first time I knew I had something? A long time ago, Townes Van Zandt stole my girlfriend away for a night. I thought, ‘I’m through with this shit’, so I wrote a song, “You Can’t Keep Me Here In Tennessee”. I played it at an afternoon happy-hour steakhouse gig and this gentleman comes walking up to the stage and says, “Can we record that song tomorrow? My boss wants to record it – and my boss is Jerry Reed.” So the next day I went around to RCA Studio A and Chet Atkins was sitting at the console. I played him the song and he



Raising his game: with Emmylou Harris at the Ottawa Folkfest, September 6, 2013

said, “OK, yeah, we’ll do this” [it appeared on Reed’s 1973 album *Lord, Mr Ford*]. I’ve written far better songs since, but that was the start of it – the beginning of my career as a professional songwriter. Thank you Townes and thank you ex-girlfriend!

Do you have any songs you started with Guy Clark that you’re still working on? James Johnson, via email

I do have a song that Guy and Susanna [Clark] and I started 40-plus ago. Now and again we’d get together and try to finish it. It just needed two lines, but they had to be exactly the right lines. And I think I might have finally solved the riddle three months ago. If I have, no doubt I will record the song. [At the Clarks’] it was red wine and grass and “What have you got? You’ve got the start of a song? Let’s hear it and try to move it down the road a little bit.” Probably the most productive times would be the mornings when I’d go round for coffee and just shoot the breeze. Something would be said and it’d be like, “Jot that down.” Chasing the humour in conversation is a precursor to writing songs.

Do you have any survival tips for hanging with Townes Van Zandt and Steve Earle? Cindy O’Connor, via email

When the guns come out, get outta there! For a while there, Steve and Townes were fascinated by guns. It never seemed dangerous to be around either one of them... except when the guns came out. But as competitive and self-destructive as Townes was, somewhere in there was a really kind and gentle spirit. I learned a lot from Townes, y’know. When he would be kicking heroin and stuff, I could see how hard it was. I said, “Well, I guess that’s not for me.” I’ve known Steve forever and when we took a bus out to Santa Fe to deliver Guy’s ashes to Terry Allen, who put them in a piece of sculpture, Steve and I sat up the whole way talking, and we somehow became even closer. I love and admire Steve. I loved Townes, but from a distance.

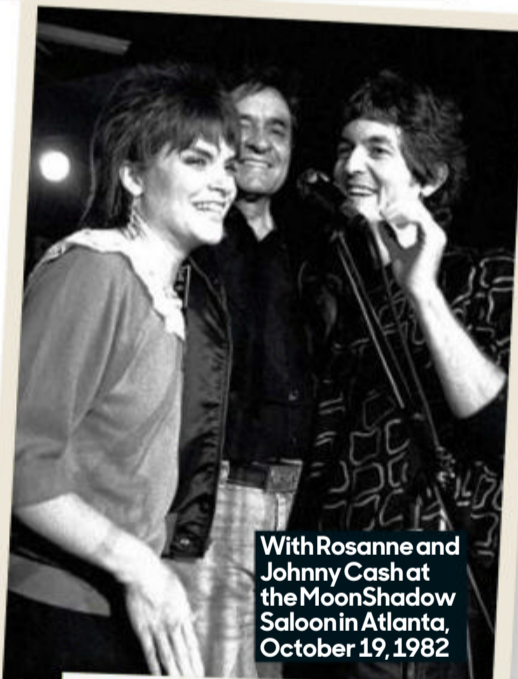
“Singing with Emmylou just makes me a better singer, no doubt about it. It’s her generosity I love most”

What’s your favourite version of one of your songs by somebody else? Matteo Beck, Bremen, Germany

Wouldn’t you know, it’s a never-released version of a song of mine called “Ashes By Now” by Roger Daltrey. It’s an outtake from the early ’80s and I had a cassette of it. It was murderously good, so much so that when I played it around the house, my then-young children would scream when the chorus came. They’ve never done that for anything I’ve ever done – they didn’t even do that for Ray Charles! I’ve since lost the tape, so my memory of it is very romantic, but it’s still the most impressive version I’ve ever heard of any of my songs.

What was Johnny Cash like as a father-in-law? Derek Moorhead, Liverpool

Intimidating, at first. And then we became great friends. When my marriage to Rosanne ended, John and June both called me and said, “We’re not gonna let you out of this family.” And then when I met and grew towards marrying my wife Claudia, as soon as they heard



With Rosanne and Johnny Cash at the Moon Shadow Saloon in Atlanta, October 19, 1982



about it, they rang me up and said, “We wanna meet your girlfriend, bring her over for dinner.” It was so generous and thoughtful. So that was what it was like to have John as a father-in-law.

Will we ever see a Cicadas reunion? That album is one of best Americana albums ever. Rick S Temple, Texas

Well, the cicadas are due to erupt here soon, 17 years since the last cicada eruption. And the drummer in The Cicadas, Greg Morrow, who lives just a stone’s throw from me, he sent me a couple of messages that said, “Look, are we gonna reprise The Cicadas?” It would be fun, wouldn’t it? But Covid prevented us from gettin’ together, so I guess we’ll miss the cicadas this time round. Cicadas are dormant for 17 years and when they come out of the ground and get up in the trees they literally have sex to death. And while they’re procreating in the trees, they are deafeningly loud because there are billions and billions of ’em. That’s why we always thought The Cicadas was a good name for a band – loud and sexy!

What’s the best thing about working with Emmylou Harris? Caroline Bradley, Hastings

The time we got to spend together, travelling side-by-side in an aeroplane, her bunk across from mine in a bus, finding breakfast together. And then there’s the fact that singing with Emmylou just makes me a better singer, no doubt about it. From the time we started those two duet albums, I improved vastly as a vocalist. It’s her generosity I love most. I don’t know [if there’ll be another duets album] but we haven’t ruled it out – we’re actually going to play a show together in Switzerland in September and we’ll bring out some of our duet numbers, so who knows?

It sounds like your songwriting is getting more political as you get older. Is that a deliberate shift in your thinking or just something that’s unavoidable having lived through Trump? Marc Ferris, Camden, London

I try not to be overtly political, ’cos if it’s topical you’re gonna date yourself pretty quickly. With *Triage*, the new album, I was very conscious [of this] as I was writing, so I think it’s more of a spiritual statement than a political statement. But if you’re trying to express the better part of your nature in this world, it’s sorta hard to avoid the have and have-not situation; economically, it’s so stacked in the favour of very few. Which I think is more humanitarian than political. The fact that equality is a political idea is a testament to how far off the track we’ve got. 🗳️

Triage is out on July 23 via RC1/Thirty Tigers

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 FRI 18 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
 SAT 19 BATH FORUM
 MON 21 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
 TUE 22 MANCHESTER BRIDGEWATER HALL
 WED 23 LONDON PALLADIUM

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 20 LOND **SOLD OUT** LADIUM
 21 LOND **SOLD OUT** LADIUM
 22 LONDON PALLADIUM
 24 MANCHESTER O₂ APOLLO
 25 EDINBURGH PLAYHOUSE
 27 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
 28 DUNDEE CAIRD HALL
 30 SCUNTHORPE THE BATHS HALL

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01 BRADFORD ST GEORGE'S HALL
 02 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL
 04 CROYDON FAIRFIELD HALLS
 05 GUILF **SOLD OUT**; LIVE
 07 BRIGHTON DOME
 08 POOLE LIGHTHOUSE
 09 BEXH **SOLD OUT**. A WARR PAVILION
 11 SOUTHAMPTON MAYFLOWER
 12 PLYMOUTH PAVILIONS
 14 CARLISLE THE SANDS CENTRE
 15 STOCKTON GLOBE
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 THU 18 MANCHESTER BRIDGEWATER HALL
 SAT 20 CAMBR **SOLD OUT** N EXCHANGE
 SUN 21 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
 TUE 23 LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC
 WED 24 BATH FORUM
 FRI 26 LONDON EVENTIM APOLLO HAMMERSMITH
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THE UNCUT GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S KEY RELEASES

RODRIGO AMARANTE

Drama

POLYVINYL

The Brazilian songwriter crafts an exquisite sonic world marked by global rhythms, cinematic textures and playful takes on tradition. *By Erin Osmon*

RODRIGO AMARANTE, it could be said, is a student of the world. A Rio de Janeiro native who now calls Los Angeles home, he's lived in many places, and is also a dedicated reader, watcher and listener who speaks with a philosopher's contemplation. He embraces life for all its beauty and absurdity, a binary that's also key to his working method. "Rather than standing on top of what I believe I am, and speaking from there, I decided to discover it, to get inside it, to get dirty," he explains. "It feels humorous, funny and ridiculous, to fiddle with the idea that I have of myself, to not embrace the mythical idea of the songwriter."

It's not the first time he's shed a de facto persona. Amarante's first band, the Rio-based rock quartet Los Hermanos, were massive in Brazil, selling out stadiums at recent reunion gigs. But rather than live a rock star's life, by the mid-noughties Amarante pivoted his focus to the samba-focused big band Orquestra Imperial. Then, in 2008, he came to LA to begin anew as a member of the short-lived indie-rock trio Little Joy, and then as a solo artist, serenading tiny east side clubs with his '30s-era Harmony parlour guitar. "A lot of people



thought I was nuts, like, 'What? You're going to play bars in Echo Park now?'" he recalls with a laugh.

Like much of Amarante's work, his second solo album *Drama* continues these subtle reinventions. Dropping the needle is to glide into a sun-drenched Technicolor universe, one steeped in tradition but innovative in its unbridled spirit. Fusing a coterie of historical sounds – from African polyrhythms and Brazilian samba to cool jazz and '60s film scores – with his in-built playfulness, the singer and songwriter has created a sophisticated yet easy-going work, one that perks up the ears with its experimentation but is also romantic, magnetic and soothing, like waves brushing over a white-sand beach. Guiding the listener through it all is Amarante's gentle, silvery voice; oscillating between languages with a dancer's fluidity, it recalls the

slightly nasal style of bossa nova singers.

There are a few places where Amarante's spiritual exploration rings clear: on "Tao", he weaves a longtime fascination with the I Ching, Zen texts and Taoism into a meditation that lyrically rotates between spiritual meta and mesa as he switches from Portuguese to English at the soft blast of a woodwind. He sings of sweeping observations ("Source of a thousand







things, the Tao is an empty cup poured and never filled...”) and specific details (“and now before my eyes the Tao must be a glance of the sweetness in her smile”) over a gentle crescendo of guitar, bass, drums, percussion and saxophones, the volume and intensity of each mirroring his words. And then there are the less obvious references, such as the opening title track, an overture that acts as a de facto mission statement, as well as a nod to the songwriter’s love of classic film. Mellotron strings meet a wave of voices, a laugh track responding to an imaginary movie, one that may only be viewed through the mind’s eye during the album’s subsequent songs. “I couldn’t help but fantasise or play with the idea that this is a story, this is a film,” Amarante says. “There was some of that in *Cavalo*, too. There’s a song that’s pretty much the same orchestration for the theme of Inspector Clouseau from *The Pink Panther*.”

But *Drama* is a fuller, more textural work than his 2014 debut *Cavalo*, one that lives up to its title’s promise, pairing vaguely dramatic ideas with intensely personal touches. Its bookends, a stirring orchestral overture and a conclusive,

contemplative piano ballad, punctuate a kind of narrative arc in which each song – or scene – depicts a character who emotes a world of feeling. But if some lines occasionally read like a masterclass in casual epiphany, Amarante, never one to take himself too seriously, often subverts the sung seriousness with off-kilter sonic accents – a banjo here, a harpsichord there, whistling, Mellotron sounds – that unite to form a maximalist symphony that is rich and intricately layered but never overwhelming.

“Maré” (“Tide”) is the album’s most energetic point, but its rhythmic party vibe belies its more serious lyrical observations about the cyclical nature of life and death, gains and losses. Its accompanying video is demonstrative of Amarante’s humorous nature, a depiction of the act of song-making done up in a palette of primary colours and throwback motifs. The mellifluous groove of “Tanto” (“So Much”) melts into a swirl of strings and saxophone as Amarante sings of the sweetness of lovers’ skin, while “Tango” recounts literal and figurative dances over soft percussive layers and breathy backing vocals provided by frequent collaborator

Cornelia Murr. “Sky Beneath” takes that spirit higher, its percussion popping like firecrackers amid lush brush strokes of strings and voice. “*Can’t fix my love, can’t fix myself, can’t fix the world,*” he sings to open the song, less a statement of defeat than an acknowledgement of human limitations.

Taken together, *Drama*’s cable-knit arrangements, tender singing and inventive takes on familiar sonic touchstones amount to something new – born of a dreamer’s mind and translated to very real and transformative four-minute vibrations. Brazilians are often known for blending

musical styles, from the evolution of the country’s native folk music and dances into maxixe (Brazilian tango), to samba’s transformations (most famously bossa nova) and Tropicália’s subversion of traditional forms. While it would be easy to attribute Amarante’s skill for it to a genetic phenomena reserved for those from the South American country, that discounts the very personal nature of *Drama*, one that is singularly introspective, playful and rooted in punk rock’s DIY spirit. After all, Amarante recorded most of the album himself, and plays no less than 10 of its instruments.

If his musical strengths are readily apparent, then, Amarante is not out to prove his power on *Drama*. Instead, this is a thoughtful, empathetic showcase of his interests, of intense feelings translated into a dreamy sonic atmosphere. It’s an album that meets the world in its moment, where global issues and far-flung international voices are more amplified and connected than ever. But with *Drama*, the world is less an oyster and more a mirror, reflecting the story and vision of this citizen of the world making sonic cinema out of personal exploration.



SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Drama
- 2 Maré
- 3 Tango
- 4 Tara
- 5 Tanto
- 6 I Can’t Wait
- 7 Tao
- 8 Sky Beneath
- 9 Eu Com Você
- 10 Um Milhão
- 11 The End

Produced by: Rodrigo Amarante
Recorded at: Amarante’s home studio; MCJ Studio, Los Angeles
Personnel: Rodrigo Amarante (guitars, bass, electric piano, organ, percussion, drums, harpsichord, Mellotron, vibraphone, celeste, banjo, tenor saxophone), Paul Taylor (drums), Todd Dahlhoff (bass, double bass, backing vocals), Andres Renteria (congas), David Ralicke (tenor and baritone saxophones, flugelhorn, trombone, trumpet), Moreno Veloso (backing vocals), Cornelia Murr (synthesisers, backing vocals), Daniel Castanheira (bamboo blocks, percussion effects, bongo, darbuka, conga, sapo), Danny Bensi (violins, violas, cello)

HOW TO BUY...

{ BRAZILIAN WAX }
 The pick of Amarante’s previous projects



LOS HERMANOS
 Los Hermanos

ABRIL MUSIC, 1999
 Though he wasn’t yet a primary songwriter or player, the debut album by Amarante’s first rock band put him on the map in Brazil in a big way. Breakout single “Anna Júlia”, a ’60s-indebted rock anthem, remains the band’s most popular song, while the Amarante-penned “Quem Sabe” displays a more aggressive side of the songwriter not often heard today. **7/10**



LITTLE JOY
 Little Joy

ROUGH TRADE, 2008
 Amarante joined forces with The Strokes’ Fabrizio Moretti after the pair met at a music festival, and formed the trio Little Joy with vocalist and noted Scientologist Binki Shapiro. The band’s self-titled debut is a mixed bag of lo-fi indie touchstones, alternately cute and confident, with a concluding track that portends Amarante’s solo work to come. **7/10**



RODRIGO AMARANTE
 Cavalo

ROUGH TRADE, 2014
 A tender 11-song set sung in English, French,

Portuguese, and Japanese. Amarante wrote and recorded his solo debut at his home studio in LA and it made many a year-end “best of” list. It also led to Amarante being tapped for “Tuyo”, a song he wrote and sang in Spanish for the popular Netflix series *Narcos*, which garnered further praise. **8/10**



Q&A

Rodrigo Amarante on toxic masculinity and a 'horizontal' approach to culture

Can you talk a little bit about the roles of old and new, tradition and innovation, in your work?

It's kind of a mantra in Brazilian culture, and how we understand ourselves, which has to do with the record, too. Identity is kind of a forgery, right? And that's OK. I think it's OK. We adopt the things that serve us, touch us and move us. And in Brazil, we approach culture in a horizontal way, not a vertical way. We rejected the hierarchy that we were supposed to inherit, like that classical music and opera is up top and then pop and folk music is on the lower shelf. During what I would call the Golden Age of Brazilians mixing styles, like in the '60s with Tropicália, that had a lasting effect on everybody, but especially artists. So I have a reverence for tradition, but it's not intellectual, it's emotional. I recognise these codes, but I recognise them inside of me, not outside, like I don't collect them and arrange them in certain ways. So there's that anthropological, cannibalistic element. Mixing styles comes naturally. Also, I'm not interested in desperately innovating because that has to do with the fantasy of the genius. I understand that art has references and reverence, but I like to do it emotionally, not rationally. When I'm writing a song, all of these things start

Amarante: "Mixing styles comes naturally"

to emerge, and I find myself discovering more than planning.

Your music hints at someone who is a deep listener and maybe collector? Do you have a big record collection?

I have a lot of records, but I'm not the kind who is like, "Oh my god! This is a first pressing." I love discovering music, and I'm lucky to have friends who educate me. I love hearing music from all kinds of parts of the world. I also love film scores. Film is a big thing for me. I still write songs pretending I'm writing a film.

One of the great things about listening to music in other languages is that the singer becomes an emotional guide rather than an intellectual one.

I find that so interesting too, because true music lovers are used to hearing music in all kinds of languages. And sometimes that's an asset. Not that all lyrics are bad and you're better off not understanding them, though that's sometimes the case. It's about the space

"True music lovers are used to hearing music in all kinds of languages"

that's left. Art is supposed to be kind of a mirror, right? An unpredictable mirror? So that space is the riches of it. In that sense, the biggest mistake is to underestimate the audience and to be redundant and to not leave space, rather than creating something that has space for multiple possibilities.

Do you consider that factor when you're deciding what language to sing in?

It comes at the very start because the theme, or whatever I'm feeling, already kind of comes with the language. There are some cases where it's planned, or there's a particular reason for it. On the previous record I wanted to write a song in French about being a foreigner, which had to do with my experience in Paris. There are some cases where it's a bit more rational, where I know that I want people who speak my language to get a glimpse of what I'm saying. But sometimes I think that's kind of silly because there's always going to be someone who doesn't understand and that's OK, too.

Why did it feel right to employ a fuller sound on this album?

I started by wanting a more modal record based on rhythms, using percussion and drums as counterpoints to the melody, to try to stay away from the rich harmonic traditions of Brazilian music. So I started writing in that mode, but then I had a thought that I was holding back for a reason that wasn't quite genuine in my heart. So I started thinking about the dryness and coolness that I was supposed to embrace as I changed from a boy to a man, and I was sent back into these memories of that transition. I was sent to this moment where I was kind of like a cute kid and very open, but I kept getting in fights, kept getting beaten up and roughed up. I pissed people off for some reason that escapes me. So my dad decided we were going to do something about this, and I thank him for it. But I remember being brought out and having my head shaved. I was a child and I had bangs, and then I had to prepare to become a man, which meant no hair. I had to dry up. I had to get rid of the drama. I had to control my sensitivity. I was also reading Bell Hooks' *The Will To Change*, a really incredible book that made me think about the patriarchy mentality, the worship of competition and the worship of merit, which is really a worship of privilege. That's what caused the record to be called *Drama*. It was to reconcile these ideas but also really embrace these things. To really go for it, to not be cool or worry about relevance. And the rest is just hopes and faith that other people will feel it. That's the reason I wrote string arrangements and played the harpsichord. This is the end of me apologising for my sensitivity and dramatic nature. **INTERVIEW: ERIN OSMON**

Making hay: Mike Lindsay and Laura Marling



LUMP

Animal CHRYSLIS/PARTISAN

8/10

Marling and Lindsay reach seventh heaven on irrepressibly fun second outing. *By Pete Paphides*

ANYONE familiar with the eponymous 2018 debut by LUMP – Laura Marling and Tunng’s Mike Lindsay – will recall that the album ended with a track called “LUMP Is A Product”, which saw Marling list the personnel involved

in making the record. The businesslike delivery was what her fans have come to expect from her. There are no outward signs of levity here. If Laura Marling derives any cathartic release from the act of writing and recording her songs, that’s something she withholds from

view. Which isn’t to say that she’s a cold fish (of the hundreds of artists this writer has interviewed over the years, she remains the only one who made us soup), it’s just that if Marling is having a brilliant time, it doesn’t quite manifest itself in all the usual ways.



It must surely, then, speak volumes about Marling’s collaborator in LUMP that she decided to return to do it all over again, complete with another end-credits monologue on the plaintively pretty closer “Phantom Limb”. And, indeed, the longer you spend with these 10 songs, the easier it is to see why. Mike Lindsay has, almost by stealth, evolved into a kind of low-key Eno for the Green Man generation. Like Eno, Lindsay seems to understand that a true sense of freedom is best attained by setting out fixed parameters. In the case of LUMP’s second album, these parameters came courtesy of a change of scenery. Relocating to Margate after a four-year spell in Reykjavik, Lindsay’s new coastal setting prompted the observation that “waves go in circles of seven, so I started to write all the music in seven form”.

For Marling, arriving in the studio with nothing prepared, that must have been

Marling comes on like an intrigued bystander to her own utterances

a surprise. “Pulling out the rhyming pattern in the tracks that were written in 7/4 was very difficult... to get my head around,” she recalled. To say that she rose to the challenge barely scratches the surface of what she and Lindsay have actually achieved on this record. In fact, it’s hard to square the record’s genesis with the sheer accessibility of the resulting songs. As the first song to be released from *Animal*, its eponymous title track hints at this harmonious outcome. “Dance, dance, this is your last chance to break a glass heart just like you wanted”, she sings over a synth hook that could just as easily have escaped from a Daft Punk record. Even taking into account the mid-song groans that pass for a middle eight, it’s the most popastically funky moment of Marling’s musical life.

That said, it’s a close call. “Gamma Ray” further underscores the realisation that Marling’s icy intonation is an improbably mesmerising vessel for a killer chorus. With her and Lindsay, it’s all about establishing a synergy of incongruents, with the almost disruptive syncopations of his backing tracks somehow never quite managing to reach the altitude needed to disrupt the imperious glide of Marling’s melodies. This fertile tension also appears to be the fuel source of “Bloom At Night” – over an intensifying sonic tableau of small-hours twinkletonica, Marling’s melodies defy tempo and time rather like the young Morrissey once

used to do with Johnny Marr’s freshly painted instrumentals.

It’s a formula that also delivers on the album’s more muted passages. Freed from the obligation to write lyrics whose meaning is immediately apparent to her, Marling often comes on like an intrigued bystander to her own utterances. Over a series of pensive tom rolls and clarinet trills, “Red Snakes” sees her both invested and detached from the karmic denouement she appears to be describing, much like a newsreader might be. It’s not exactly a shoo-in for the 6 Music playlist, and yet here’s the odd thing about *Animal*: wherever you care to drop the needle or let the shuffle button take you, the essence of this collaboration and the velocity of its execution somehow hoovers you up and brings you along.

In interviews, Lindsay has attributed much of the warmth of his recent productions to his acquisition of an Eventide H949 Harmonizer – the tuning device used to confer a treacly thickness upon the sound of records as disparate as David Bowie’s *Low* and Van Halen’s “Jump” – and its almost ABBA-like effect in doubling up Marling’s vocals on several songs instantly ups the pop quotient. But history is littered with forgotten clunkers that no amount of hardware could enhance. Perhaps then, there’s a more prosaic explanation for the secret sauce that keeps you coming back to *Animal*: sometimes, it’s just fun to find yourself in the company of people having fun.

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Bloom At Night
- 2 Gamma Ray
- 3 Climb Every Wall
- 4 Animal
- 5 Red Snakes
- 6 Hair On The Pillow
- 7 Paradise
- 8 We Cannot Resist
- 9 Oberon
- 10 Phantom Limb

Produced by:

Mike Lindsay

Recorded at:

High Studio, Margate, Kent

Personnel:

Mike Lindsay (Octatrack, Mellotron, Juno 60, modular Moogs, Op1, Eventide H949, Vocoder, OtoBiscuit, electric guitars, bass guitar, piano), Laura Marling (vocals, bass clarinet), Laura J Martin (flutes), Matt Ingram (drums)

AtoZ

This month...

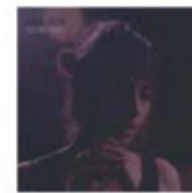
- P22 JOHN MURRY
 P24 THE FLATLANDERS
 P25 JACKSON BROWNE
 P26 KINGS OF CONVENIENCE
 P28 THE GO! TEAM
 P30 SLEATER-KINNEY
 P34 JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN
 P35 WOLF ALICE

AROOJ AFTAB Vulture Prince

NEW AMSTERDAM

9/10

Spellbinding east-meets-west concoction. Comes with its own perfume oil!



Unsurprisingly, demand for calming, quasi-spiritual music has boomed during the pandemic. Like Floating Points’ recent collaboration with Pharoah Sanders, the third album from Brooklyn-based singer Arooj Aftab seems tailor-made to meet that demand. Yet *Vulture Prince*’s tranquility is hard won; Aftab’s brother died during the writing of the album and she channelled her grief by removing drums from most of the songs and conducting her musicians – often just classical guitar, harp and violin – with the natural rhythms of her breath. Minimalist yet intoxicating, the likes of “Mohabbat” and “Diya Hai” are based on traditional Pakistani songs of yearning, placed in a radical new context that only enhances their power. **SAM RICHARDS**

MARINA ALLEN Candlepower

FIRE

7/10

Singer-songwriter’s debut mini-LP leaves us wanting more



Economy of expression is a rare commodity, and seven songs in 19 minutes feel like a tidy introduction to this contemplative Californian. There’s a soothingly languid quality to her voice on the wistfully strummed paean “Oh Louise”, and its Karen Carpenter-like warmth on “Reunion” glows above a sparse bed of piano. On the acoustic meditation of “Sleeper Train”, her vocal is doubled to produce an alluring harmony, while the bass loop underpinning “Belong Here” proves hypnotic as Allen’s voice meanders Joni-style over it. Elsewhere, the part-spoken “Believer” conjures images of a poet wandering and idly warbling to herself. **JOHNNY SHARP**

Q&A

Laura Marling on young love and laziness

What’s fun about working with Mike?

He’s one of life’s true artists – music and fun are his priorities and nothing distracts him from the former, which often leads to the latter. A good balance for someone like me, who can easily forget the importance of either.

You’ve remarked – perhaps even complained! – that throughout your career, people have tried to separate you from your guitar. In LUMP, you willingly relinquish your guitar! What can we infer from this?

Between making [2017’s solo] *Semper Femina* and these two LUMP albums, I acquired the life skill of collaboration and learnt that if you’re offered an opportunity to share the load with somebody, not only does that make it an enjoyable process in a different way but you can also make something greater than the sum of its parts. Mike spends months creating a sonic world and I get to swan in and ramble over it for a few days and take



equal ownership, so I’ve shelved my complaining. Also I’m trying to make sure the discourse about gender doesn’t make me overly defensive of boundaries, which it may have in the past, and I’m not convinced defensiveness is conducive to the making of “art”. And I do play guitar live.

If we were able to watch you both at work in the studio, is there anything that would surprise us?

How little I contribute. Mike is usually twisting knobs, sitting up and down on his chair, turning on synths and pulling a saz off the wall; he runs at a high energy. I do not.

“We Cannot Resist” seems to celebrate an idealised notion of young love. That’s not a message that’s abundant in your solo oeuvre...

I didn’t really know what love was before I actually found it – so it’s possible that my oeuvre is based entirely on a misconception. Having said that, young love is almost always a misconception. With extra fuel on the fire provided by the narcissism of youth. It’s what makes youth so central to cultural interests – reminding us what life was before we knew the full extent of its complexity.

INTERVIEW: PETE PAPHIDES



Best served cold: Murry can't forget

JOHN MURRY

The Stars Are God's Bullet Holes

SUBMARINE CAT

9/10

Vengeful and chewed up, but varied. *By Allan Jones*



"BOUGHT fertiliser and brake fluid/Who in the hell am I supposed to trust?" John Murry's new album opens with a song about a man

building a bomb that somehow introduces Oscar Wilde into a narrative about American unrest. Domestic terrorism, the Oklahoma bombing, gas chambers, low-flying police helicopters, natty Oscar playing bridge. Longstanding fans will take these uneasy juxtapositions in their stride. Nearly everything Murry's released to date has sounded like a dispatch from one war zone or another – both his previous solo albums tackle the issue of trauma.

There was more to 2013's *The Graceless Age* than a plainly autobiographical song about flatlining after a heroin overdose. But the album was eventually dominated by the nine pain-wracked minutes of "Little Coloured Balloons". It's still the song everyone wants to hear him play when they see him live, a man who came back from the dead singing about his

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Oscar Wilde (Came Here To Make Fun Of You)
- 2 Perfume & Decay
- 3 The Stars Are God's Bullet Holes
- 4 Di Kreutzer Sonata
- 5 I Refuse To Believe (You Could Love Me)
- 6 Ones + Zeros
- 7 Time & A Rifle
- 8 Ordinary World
- 9 1(1)1
- 10 Yer Little Black Book

Produced by: John Parish
Recorded at: Rockfield Studios, Monmouth
Personnel: John Murry (vocals, guitar), Nadine Khouri, Hopey Parish (backing vocals), John Parish (guitar, piano, bass, perc, variophon, organ, Fender Rhodes, bass synth), Johnny Boyle (drums), Tali (piano, bass), Joe Jones (electronics), Joe Harvey-Whyte (pedal steel), Lizzie Evans (handclaps), Drew Morgan (cello)

own resurrection. *A Short History Of Decay* (2017) was written in the aftermath of a nasty divorce, Murry simultaneously rocked by the death of former American Music Club drummer Tim Mooney, who produced and, over the four years of its making, helped shape the songs on *The Graceless Age*. Mooney gave the album a dense, textured sound: layers of keyboards, strings, crackling radio broadcasts; synthesisers and sundry electronics. Cowboy Junkies' Michael Timmins produced the follow-up, the whole thing taped and mixed in just five

days. It sounded like it had been recorded in a lost, lonely place. A holding cell or isolation ward, perhaps.

At first listen, *The Stars Are God's Bullet Holes* comes from a similarly dour location at the end of the line, ill-lit and funky. Its mood is generally heavy but a frailty prevails, something vaguely tranquilised about a lot of the record. There seems initially to be not much body at all to bits of it. At one point or another, most of the album sounds in fact like it should be on life-support. Even the handclaps sound worn out. The songs mostly are reduced to sinew and gristle, as if the meat has been chewed off them by passing coyotes. Play it again, however, and it's neither listless nor inert. Murry and producer John Parish know a thing or two about creating compelling atmospheres out of meagre resources. The album is built from vocal and instrumental tics and spasms. Guitars that crackle like burning wallpaper. Glitchy electronics that course through

the tracks like syntax errors in a computer code, Nadine Khouri's timelapse harmonies. Scraps of pedal steel, piano, cello. "Oscar Wilde (Came Here To Make Fun Of You)" casts individual turmoil alongside wider public derangement. "Ones + Zeros" starts as a frayed ballad about dashed hopes that decides it's time to reject oppression. "*Spit on your hands, raise the black flag/Cut each throat, drown the old hag...*" An unexpected version of Duran Duran's "Ordinary World" that turns it into an insidious stalking blues with pustulant guitar also pits singular distress against a broader disintegration.

Mostly, though, Murry is concerned with personal emotional plight, the scorched earth of his own life. "Perfume & Decay" is a song about an imploding relationship that sounds like a drugged message on an answerphone. The title track essays similar territory, carried by the fuzz-box malignancy of Murry's writhing electric guitar. Murry carries grudges like an old-school Mafia boss with a hundred recipes for dishes best served cold. Revenge runs through these songs like a virus, infecting track after unvaccinated track. "*God may forgive them for what I can't forget*", Murry sings grimly on "Time & A Rifle", over a messy, slithering guitar riff. The otherwise beautiful "Di Kreutzer Sonata" turns a fierce gaze on his adoptive family ("They didn't adopt me, they bought me," Murry recently wrote on his website), the track ending with whistling and a dreamy instrumental coda that sounds like the closing theme to a film that's left everyone dead in a Mexican desert. "I Refuse To Believe (You Could Love Me)" is a desiccated glam stomp, Murry baffled by his romantic predicament over a Moe Tucker backbeat.

"1(1)1" is two minutes of ugly noise as superfluous as a 'hidden' bonus track, possibly called "You Don't Miss Me", a thrashing thing. The album as advertised properly ends, however, with the reptilian loop of "Yer Little Black Book", Murry sitting in his car, singing along to a radio playing Joy Division's "She's Lost Control", thinking about his own worthlessness as the last light fades on another day in paradise.

Q&A

John Murry on covers and altered states

The new album starts with a song that evokes the 1995 Oklahoma bombing.

Some people will listen to the opening of the song and think of Timothy McVeigh, but with over 200 mass shootings in the USA clocked before the calendar clicked into June, it could be about a lot of people. Christ, it is about a lot of people.

What prompted the cover of Duran Duran's "Ordinary World"?

I told John Parish that I always like to include a cover on each of my records. I played him a bunch and he picked "Ordinary World". He played bass on it, came up with the Led Zeppelin-style groove on it.

How did Parish come to produce the album?

I've known John for the guts of a decade. When we started

working on the new record, he asked me what kind of record I wanted to make. I would talk about Tricky, Portishead, Massive Attack – I didn't know John had such a huge connection to those things. I didn't know I could trust someone like that. It was strange and was far more "altering" than any substance I have taken. It really changed the way I look at music, the way I make music, the way I will continue to make music. *INTERVIEW: ALLAN JONES*

{ AMERICANA }

Country, bluegrass, folk and more



Good ol' joys: (l-r) Butch Hancock, Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore

THE FLATLANDERS

Treasure Of Love

THIRTY TIGERS/RACK'EM

8/10

Fabled Texan trio make edifying comeback with a mostly-covers set



BEHOLDEN to no-one but themselves, The Flatlanders' dogleg career is impossible to second guess. Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock first got together in 1972, but their proto-Americana – a porous blend of country, folk, rock'n'roll and western swing – fell largely on deaf ears outside their home state of Texas. They were done in a little over a year, the band taking on semi-mythic status (their aborted debut eventually landed in 1990) as each member advanced into a successful solo career.

Treasure Of Love, their first studio effort in 12 years, might not have happened at all if it hadn't been for the pandemic. The trio began recording these tracks some time ago, only finding time to revisit them when the touring circuit shut. Co-produced by longtime collaborator and fellow Lubbock legend Lloyd Maines, it's a wondrous celebration of the music that's sustained them over the decades, much of it part of their stage repertoire. The Flatlanders exude joy here. Popularised in the late '50s by The

Everly Brothers, "Long Time Gone" is a faultless distillation of timeless honky-tonk; Johnny Cash's "Give My Love To Rose" takes on the requisite Tennessee Two chug; country licks and pedal steel spark the engine of Leon Russell's exuberant "She Smiles Like A River". Hancock's own "Moanin' Of The Midnight Train", revived from his '90s solo catalogue, feels of a piece too, with its raw swing and spacious Texan groove.

The trio's ability to fully inhabit these songs is masterful. Their take on "Snowin' On Raton", Townes Van Zandt's cursed road hymn, manages to sound both expansive and vulnerable, its conflicted sentiments measured out in aching peals of slide guitar. Similarly, Paul Siebel's "The Ballad Of Honest Sam" is reconfigured into something that Hank Williams might have deemed worthy of cutting for MGM. But the indomitable spirit of *Treasure Of Love* is best captured on the Mississippi Sheiks' "Sittin' On Top Of The World", a rollicking live favourite that feels like a paean to lasting friendship.

ROBHUGHES

AMERICANA ROUND-UP

Nashville legend **Connie Smith** returns in late August with *The Cry Of The Heart* FAT POSSUM, her first album in a decade. Produced by husband Marty Stuart – and arriving on the heels of her classic "Once A Day" being added to the National Recording Registry – it includes covers of Merle Haggard's "Jesus Takes A Hold" and Dallas Frazier's "I Don't Believe Me Anymore". There's also a brace of Smith and Stuart co-writes: "Here Comes My Baby Back Again" and "Spare Me No Truth Tonight". And look out for a forthcoming TV documentary about the trailblazing singer, *Connie: The Cry Of The Heart*. The ever-dependable **Jim Lauderdale** offers up *Hope* YEP-ROC, co-produced with longtime collaborator **Jay Weaver**, at the back end of



Connie Smith

July. Backed by a crack team that includes guitarists **Chris Scruggs** and **Kenny Vaughan**, with harmonies courtesy of **Lillie Mae** and **Frank Rische**, the album features "Memory", one of Lauderdale's final co-writes with the late Robert Hunter of Grateful Dead fame. The spacious arrangements are styled after the Dead, Neil Young and Little Feat. And the nominations for this year's Americana Honours & Awards show, taking place in Nashville on 20 September, are in. **Margo Price**, **Brandi Carlile**, **Jason Isbell**, **Kathleen Edwards** and **Billy Strings** are up for Artist Of The Year, while **The Highwomen** and **Our Native Daughters** are among those toughing it out for Best Group. ROBHUGHES

DOT ALLISON

Heart-Shaped Scars

SARECORDINGS

6/10

Former post-rave trip-hop icon rediscovers her folk-pop muse



After more than a decade dealing with family commitments, Scottish singer-songwriter and former One Dove frontwoman Dot Allison

reconnects with her pastoral folk-pop muse on this elegantly understated comeback. Recording in Edinburgh with a team of female collaborators, Allison coos doleful ruminations on love and loss over gently plucked ukulele, sparingly deployed strings and sampled birdsong. The default mood is a little too polite, but standout numbers include the spine-tingling waltz "Can You Hear Nature Sing?", with its exquisitely intertwined vocal harmonies and vaguely sinister *Wicker Man* feel, and "Love Died In Our Arms", a welcome detour into full-bodied electro-acoustic trip-hop melodrama. Classy but underpowered.

STEPHENDALTON

ANIKA

Change SACRED BONES/INVADA

8/10

Change is afoot on former journalist's first solo album in 11 years



Having worked with Geoff Barrow's *Beak>* on her 2010 solo album, here Anika moves on from the dub-heavy approach of that record to something more rooted in dark, bubbling electronics merged with dreamy soundscapes. Working with Martin Thulin from her other band, Exploded View, here – as heard on "Critical" – Anika drifts into Broadcast-like territory, combining cosmic pop with her uniquely soothing yet distant vocals. The title track is the album's most exquisite moment, a swaying, tender ode to the changes we undergo, or don't, through life, backed by delicate drum taps and gorgeous glistening ripples of electronics. A most welcome return. DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

JOAN ARMATRADING

Consequences BMG

7/10

Melodic singer-songwriter's recent renaissance continues



Joan Armatrading's previous outing, 2018's *Not Too Far Away*, was her first major-label album – and her first UK chart hit – in nearly a quarter of a century.

Coincidentally or otherwise, *Consequences* is a notably confident-sounding record, Armatrading repeatedly performing her signature trick of producing soaring melodies that sound as effortless as sighs, especially on the upbeat confection "Better Life" and the gospelly devotional "Think About Me". The sound overall is evocative of her commercial peak of the 1980s – a decade whose production tropes haven't necessarily aged brilliantly, but which suited Armatrading's expansive pop then and still do now. ANDREW MUELLER

DANIEL AVERY
Together In Static PHANTASY
 7/10

Collection of static ambient plucked from special live show



A year after dropping a surprise 2020 lockdown album, *Love + Light*, Daniel Avery wrote a whole new collection of music to perform at some socially distanced shows. Here he releases them as a full album. The opening “Crystal Eyes”, all whirring drones and slowly shifting tones, sets the tone for an album heavy on immersive ambience. However, as the title suggests, there’s plenty of static to be found too – along with touches of deconstructed techno – as heard on the distorted and beat-heavy “Fountain Of Peace”, the results of which shift the album from serene and calm to agitated and unsettling.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

BLACKBERRY SMOKE
You Hear Georgia

THIRTY TIGERS

6/10

Georgia rockers continue to profitably mine their comfort zone



Blackberry Smoke’s greatest asset remains their greatest handicap: they’re almost too adept for their own good at replicating every nuance of early-’70s Southern country rock. Produced, as appears to be obligatory in modern country circles, by Dave Cobb, *You Hear Georgia* is a 50-years-later companion to the Allman Brothers’ *Eat A Peach* and Lynyrd Skynyrd’s *Second Helping*. Blackberry Smoke embrace this destiny lustily – Lynyrd Skynyrd’s Ricky Medlocke co-writes one song, and most others sound like someone from Skynyrd did. But the best tracks, counterintuitively, are those furthest from Blackberry Smoke’s trademark boogie – “Ain’t The Same”, a harmony-soaked Eagles-ish lament, and “Lonesome For A Livin’”, a perfect tears-in-beer country duet with Jamey Johnson.

ANDREW MUELLER

BLANK GLOSS
MELT KOMPAKT

8/10

Where the desert meets the sky



Having contributed to Kompakt’s Pop Ambient series, Sacramento duo Patrick Hills and Morgan Fox join the growing ranks of those, like SUSS, exploring the emerging ‘Ambient Americana’ scene’s barren but beautiful landscapes. E-bow guitar floats over the pretty ripples of “Those Who Plant” and “Walking Toward The End”, while sustained guitar notes drift across the horizons of



Cedric Burnside

PETER BRUNTNELL
Journey To The Sun

DOMESTICO

7/10

Accomplished British songwriter breaks out the bouzouki



Bruntnell’s latest album is largely self-performed and recorded at home, but that doesn’t impede the ambition

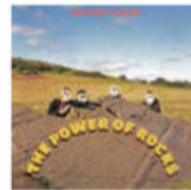
of tracks such as the stately eight-minute “Dharma Liar”, an extended folk meditation on human error, or its polar opposite, “The Antwerp Effect”, a buzzing miniature instrumental played solely on synth. Bruntnell is at heart a folk songwriter – the cover of “Wild Mountain Thyme” is a spritely highlight – but to expand texture, Bruntnell incorporates a range of digital and folk instruments, using the bouzouki as an anchoring sound, while his fine vocals and sense of melody retain the atmosphere of vintage Neil Hannon. PETER WATTS

BUFFET LUNCH
The Power Of Rocks

UPSET THERHYTHM

7/10

Intriguing compendium of Caledonian quirkiness



Two well-received 2020 EPs gave notice of Glasgow/Edinburgh-based Buffet Lunch’s idiosyncratic art rock, and this full-length debut offers a more detailed portrait. The maniacal waltz of “Red Apple Happiness” suggests a mash-up of Mark E Smith and Kurt Weill, all jerky guitars and militaristic woodwind, and similarly oddball musical mosaics lay the foundations for railing against ineffectual politicians (“Pebbledash”) and extolling the joys of rugged coastal life (“Bladderwrack”), while the uplifting title track is an even more fulsome celebration of the natural world (recording took place on the banks of Upper Loch Fyne in Argyll). It’s an album packed with leftfield ideas and off-kilter lyrical narratives seemingly fashioned in fever dreams.

TERRY STAUNTON

“Hollowed Out”, its spacious shimmers as expansive as any Daniel Lanois production. Brian Eno’s partial collaboration with Lanois, *Apollo: Atmospheres And Soundtracks*, is also recalled by “Rags” and “Virga”, while “Stained Glass” at times sounds like a New Age instrumental take on Talk Talk’s “Runeii”. WYNDHAM WALLACE

LEON BRIDGES
Gold-Diggers Sound

COLUMBIA

7/10

Seductive update for Grammy-winning Texan’s third



His 2015 debut shunted Bridges into the spotlight with its immaculate – some might say overly studied – reprise of ’60s Southern soul. The follow-up was a transitional set, but now he’s tipped the balance in favour of modern R&B-soul, à la Blood Orange. “Sho Nuff” and “Details” lean more toward the ‘old’ Bridges – he’s satisfying two audiences, clearly – while “WDYTM” is too syrupy, but there are fresh beats, moods and textures, plus guests including Terrace Martin (on the yearning “Sweeter”) and Robert Glasper (the gorgeous, gliding “Born Again”). That Bridges’ voice, with its mix of rapture and hurt, is a thing of effortless beauty hardly needs repeating. SHARON O’CONNELL

JACKSON BROWNE
Downhill From Everywhere

INSIDERECDINGS

7/10

Archetypal LA artist largely sidesteps self-entrapment on 15th studio album



For 35 years, Jackson Browne has been walking the tightrope between the personal and the political, frequently tumbling into didacticism but determined to find a balance. While *Downhill From Everywhere* climaxes with the ham-fisted “Until Justice Is Real”, the 72-year-old singer-songwriter has otherwise managed to thread the needle by embedding his compassion in consummate craftsmanship. What binds sociopolitical screeds such as the title song with the trademark ballads “Still Looking For Something”, “It’s Too Soon To Say” and “The Human Touch” are the song-serving chops and spirited collegiality of a studio band anchored by bass player Bob Glaub, and Greg Leisz, whose lap steel, pedal steel and guitars shimmer with humanity, as poignantly expressive as the songs they grace.

BUD SCOPPA

CEDRIC BURNSIDE
I Be Trying

SINGLELOCK

8/10

RL Burnside’s spirit comes alive on his grandson’s mesmerising ninth LP



On the heels of The Black Keys’ Mississippi Hill Country blues homage *Delta Kream* comes Cedric Burnside’s bone-dry, stunningly pure *I Be Trying*, cut at Willie Mitchell’s hallowed Royal Studios in Memphis by his son Boo Mitchell. Like RL Burnside, his granddaddy and mentor, Cedric spins off filigreed guitar licks that change shape as they unreel and lyrics so concise they make haikus seem long-winded. Cedric and North Mississippi Allstars guitarist Luther Dickinson lock horns kinetically on “Step In” and “Keep On Pushing”, and Alabama Shakes’ Zac Cockrell lays down the album’s lone bassline on the polyrhythmic chugger “Pretty Flowers”; otherwise, *I Be Trying* sounds as stark and untamed as a field recording, belying the perfectionism with which it was made. BUD SCOPPA

TURNER CODY AND THE SOLDIERS OF LOVE
Friends In High Places

CAPITANE

8/10

Onetime folkie locates his inner cowboy



Previously at the forefront of New York’s anti-folk scene in the early ’00s, the prolific Turner Cody has shifted towards a more countrified sound of late. This first outing with Belgian quintet The Soldiers Of Love (led by producer Nicolas Michaux) is his most persuasive statement thus far, positing Cody as a baleful country-soul descendent of Tony Joe White or early ’70s Gene Clark. The twin poles of his unhurried, sometimes playful approach are best represented by barroom elegy “Boozing And Losing” and the comely groove of “Lonely Days In Hollywood”, which exudes a certain SoCal timelessness. ROB HUGHES



Head for the country: Turner Cody And The Soldiers Of Love

White Flowers Day by day

debut album out

11.06.21

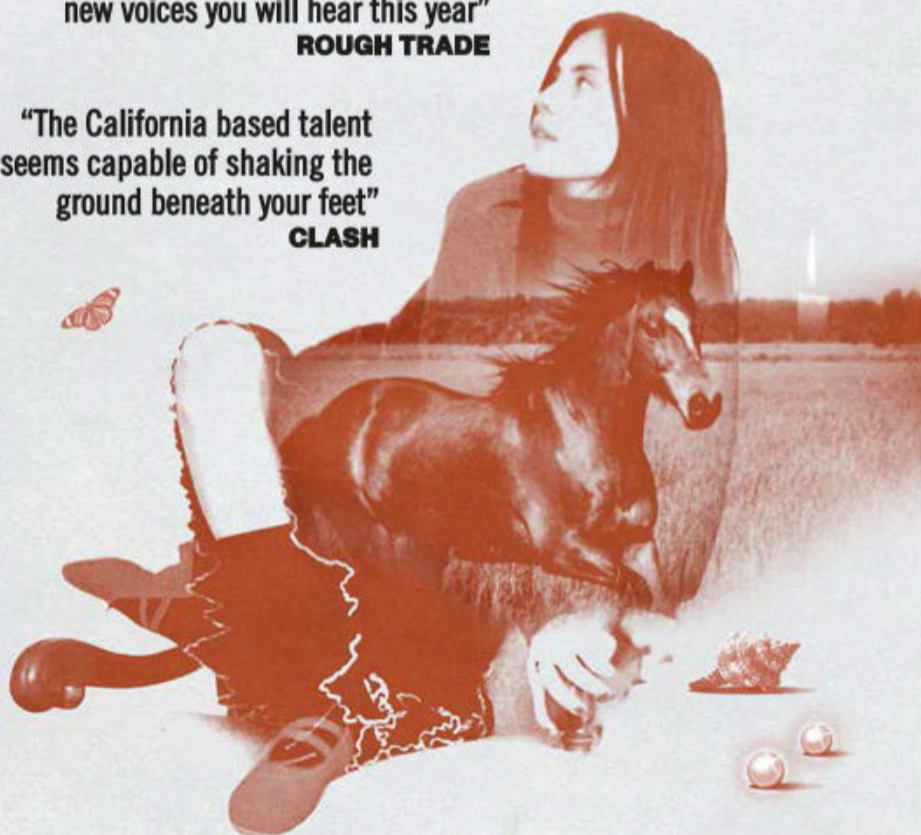
TOUGH
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KINGS OF CONVENIENCE

Peace Or Love EMI

9/10

Stylish, melancholic moves by the Bergen grandmasters. *By Tom Pinnock*



ON the cover of *Peace Or Love*, the long-awaited fourth album by Eirik Glambek Bøe and Erlend Øye, the Norwegian duo are playing chess on a

stylish piece of furniture. It's not the first time the game has featured on their record sleeves – the art for 2004's *Riot On An Empty Street* included a half-played board on the shaggy rug of a chic apartment, while 2009's *Declaration Of Dependence* depicted the duo taking a break from a game on a Mexican beach.

Bøe and Øye do enjoy chess (the latter spent most of a recent quarantine playing it online), but their frequent references to it also capture something fundamental about the alliance that's always powered Kings Of Convenience. Though their music is hushed, thoughtful, polite even, their relationship has always been fiery and competitive, the beauty and stillness of their songs fashioned from conflict.

The 12 years between *Declaration Of Dependence* and *Peace Or Love* weren't the result of struggle and strife, however, but rather of a quest for perfection. Recording took place sporadically over five years and spanned five different cities, including Siracusa in Sicily, where Øye now lives, with the duo searching only for the right mood and feel, a kind of loose magic, rather than any technical prowess. Their efforts seem to have paid off, for *Peace Or Love* is their most cohesive album yet. While it's not a world away from their previous work, the mood is noticeably more stripped-down and melancholic – there's nothing like *Riot...*'s "I'd Rather Dance With You" or *Declaration...*'s "Boat

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Rumours
- 2 Rocky Trail
- 3 Comb My Hair
- 4 Angel
- 5 Love Is A Lonely Thing
- 6 Fever
- 7 Killers
- 8 Ask For Help
- 9 Catholic Country
- 10 Song About It
- 11 Washing Machine

Produced by: Kings Of Convenience
Recorded at: Santiago, Chile; Siracusa, Sicily; Bergen, Norway; Gothenburg, Sweden; Funkhaus Studios, Berlin
Personnel includes: Eirik Glambek Bøe (vocals, guitars), Erlend Øye (vocals, guitars), Leslie Feist (vocals), Alexander Grieg (double bass)

Behind" – perhaps informed by the last decade, which saw Øye lose his parents and Bøe suffer the breakup of his marriage to Ina Grung, the cover star of *Riot...* and their debut, 2000's *Quiet Is The New Loud*.

In customary fashion, they begin with a slow, desolate song. "Rumours", driven by three intertwining acoustic guitars, addresses someone facing "accusations we both know are wrong"; in close, breathy harmony, they offer support and advice, but it might be too late: "I want to tell you that I love you/But I know you can't hear me now".

"Comb My Hair", with its fast, coiled fingerpicking, is darker still. Here, with the loss of a loved one, the protagonist is

unable to get out of bed; even the stars and the warm evening air are "cold and senseless now". "Love Is A Lonely Thing", a tranquilised, echoing ballad with verses shared between Øye, Bøe and a returning Feist, and the minor-key "Killers", both deal with the pain of love, of waiting interminably for someone or something to appear. Closer "Washing Machine", one of the best tracks here, uses clashing guitar chords and plaintive viola to emphasise Øye's romantic dejection and existential angst: "It's true I'm more wise now than I was when I was 21/It's true I've less time now than I had when I was 21..."

Not everything is quite as dark, though: Bøe's "Rocky Trail" is a skipping, bossa nova cousin to "Misread", but it twists and turns so deliciously that its chorus appears only once. "Fever" places electronic beats under Øye's wry contrasting of lovesickness and actual sickness, but the effect is reassuringly subtle. "Catholic Country", meanwhile, is swaying and vaguely South American, the chorus written with The Staves and beautifully delivered by Feist.

Ultimately, it's the sparse, live interplay between the two guitars and voices that carries *Peace Or Love*. The arrangements were largely worked out on tour, while recording mostly took place in homes – hence the Sicilian crickets that accompany Bøe on "Killers". There are mistakes here too, especially on "Washing Machine", which only enhance the air of intimacy.

After a quarter of a century playing together, Kings Of Convenience seem to have discovered the purest essence of the music they create. It's become increasingly tricky to tell who originated these songs, especially when, as on "Catholic Country", Bøe is singing Øye's lyrics over his own riff; what's more, any frills they might have dabbled with in the past have been stripped out, leaving only the bones of the songs and whispers of the rawest feelings. Stylish moves, perfectly played.

Q&A

Eirik Glambek Bøe & Erlend Øye: "We're like brothers... or an old couple"

How is your relationship now – has it changed over the years?

BØE: It changes all the time. We tend to see ourselves as the other's opposite, that's a part of our identity, but then having spent so much time together during all these years, we've realised we are very similar in many ways.
ØYE: You could say we're like brothers or we're like an old couple. You take each other for granted so much, and you don't really have a choice to not have the other person in your life, so that opens up for very spite-y, venomous

little attacks, sarcasm, stuff like this. With some of the songs on this album, it was like a constant battleground for five years, about which direction it should go in.
BØE: I think Erlend knows my songs are good, and I know Erlend's songs are good.

What was the mood you were searching for on these recordings?

ØYE: All the songs are based on a live take of the two of us playing together. A song like "Washing Machine" was much more elaborated, but in the end we felt that the simple emotion you can hear on the version on the album is just more true, and that's not something you can redo. You don't wanna hear your brain

at work, just your intuition.

BØE: We are very afraid of infusing too much feeling into a take, but at the same time there has to be some emotional presence. It's hard to define. But that realisation made us re-record everything during the last two years of the project. We didn't throw away all the old recordings, but we were looking with new glasses.

So it won't be another 12 years until the next?

BØE: We're always optimistic, but we're always naïve. But we have plenty of great songs that we couldn't fit in there, so there's gonna be a new album – we have to release those songs too.

INTERVIEW: TOM PINNOCK

COLLEEN

The Tunnel And The Clearing

THRILL JOCKEY

7/10

French artist conveys complex feelings through breezy ruminations



Written and recorded amid turbulent life changes at her home in Barcelona, *The Tunnel And The Clearing*,

Cécile Schott's eighth album under the Colleen monicker, reads like a compendium of haunting secular hymns. Breezy organ, processed through electronics and bolstered by drum-machine programming, swirls around her ghostly voice, which exhumes complex emotions to meditative effect, like a stripped-down Beach House. The whole thing whispers and swirls with ease, cradling the ears before and after the title track shocks the listener with a pulsating instrumental transmission seemingly beamed from the depths of outer space. **ERINOSMON**

RODNEY CROWELL

Triage RCL/THIRTY TIGERS

7/10

Compelling meditation on strange days by the songwriter's songwriter



By Crowell's own telling, *Triage* was rethought as it was being recorded; work began in late 2019, but Crowell

wanted to reflect something of the weirdness that enveloped the world in early 2020. It seems to have nudged Crowell out of his comfort zone: there is less than usual here of the breezy country usually associated with his name. More characteristic of *Triage* are "Something Has To Change" and "Transient Global Amnesia Blues" – fretful, semi-spoken jeremiads set to brooding backdrops. Crowell has the wit and the gravitas to land these, however – and "One Little Bird" and "I'm All About Love" demonstrate his undimmed way with a deadpan country ballad. **ANDREW MUELLER**

GEMMA CULLINGFORD

Let Me Speak

OUTRÉ

7/10

Sink Ya Teeth star's intimate and slinky synthpop



After the upfront funk of Sink Ya Teeth's two albums, bassist Gemma Cullingford's solo debut is an introverted affair that

shines a light on her studio prowess as she dishes out primitive electro ballads and proto-house grooves. In a past life, Cullingford co-founded the Norwich Ukulele Society, but here she expresses herself with snaking basslines and soulful synths on the likes of "Queen Bee" and "Let Me Speak", sultry cuts laced with charged lyrics. The



Amaro Freitas

streetwise hustle of "Wide Boys" is a highlight, likewise her deliciously deadpan cover of Bobby Gentry's "Ode To Billie Joe" in the style of Bobby Orlando. **PIERSMARTIN**

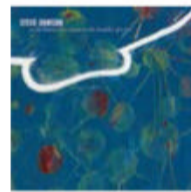
STEVE DAWSON

At The Bottom Of A Canyon In The Branches Of A Tree

PRAVDA

7/10

Former Dolly Varden songwriter strips it back down



After impressing many with last year's *Last Flight Out* album with jazz trio Funeral Bonsai Wedding and added

orchestral accoutrements, this prolific Chicagoan returns to more traditional Americana accompaniment for a meditation on love, loss and regret. If, as the title suggests there's a slight air of resignation and defeat to this album, it's still beautifully expressed, via touches like the shimmering slide and CSNY-style harmonies on the title track, a lovely languid guitar figure wrapping around "However It Takes" and some irresistibly nostalgic sun-dappled folk-pop on "22 Rubber Bands". **JOHNNY SHARP**

CHRIS ECKMAN

Where The Spirit Rests

GLITTERHOUSE

7/10

Seven songs of comfort and connection for a time lacking both



In times of "too much shock and too little awe", Chris Eckman's voice is a solid, comforting centre. For his fifth solo album,

the Ljubljana-based veteran of '80s rockers The Walkabouts reached out to electronic composer Alastair McNeill and a cast of remote collaborators to provide a different perspective, letting them add what they thought fitted to his spacious guitar-and-vocal takes. The booming drone McNeill layered under "Early Snow" makes the otherwise airy album opener sound like closing the curtains on inclement weather, while violinist Catherine Graindorge's spellbinding arrangements on "Cabin Fever" and the title track add depth, warmth and mystery. **LISA-MARIE FERLA**

FM EINHET

Exhibition Of A Dream

COLD SPRING

7/10

Nocturnal narratives from former industrial noisenik



In the 1980s you might have seen FM Einheit wielding a hammer drill as "chief machinery operator" of Einstürzende

Neubauten. By its nature, *Exhibition Of A Dream* is a somewhat softer affair: a series of dream narratives set to music, debuted at Lisbon's Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian in 2017. Musically, it explores a sort of nocturnal jazz, augmented by subtle brass, flute and occasional chorusing from the Gulbenkian Choir. It's the monologues that make it, though: see Lee Ranaldo's beatnik-tinged "Alpine Traum", or the closing "Creation re/Created", which finds the late Genesis P-Orridge in communion with extraterrestrial intelligence. **LOUIS PATTISON**

ELEPHANT9

Arrival Of The New Elders

RUNEGRAMMOFON

9/10

Thick-skinned Norwegian trio stir up a strange jazz-rock brew



Norwegian jazz has travelled leagues since Jan Garbarek's glacial era. Elephant9 – keyboardist Ståle

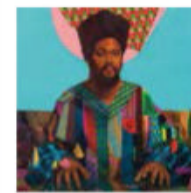
Storlækken, bassist Nikolai Eilertsen and drummer Torstein Lofthus – trace a molten, volcanic line of descent from Miles's early-'70s electric stews and the progressive jazz rock of The Tony Williams Lifetime, Soft Machine and Nucleus. Supersilent member Storlækken's mystic, murky organs are the most pungent ingredient in this steaming salmagundi, but on their 10th album the threesome achieve telepathic communion. Ranging from the Can-like polyrhythms of "Rite Of Accession" and "Throughout The Worlds" to the weightless slo-mo funk of "Solar Song", this is an Elephant9 you'll never forget. **ROB YOUNG**

AMARO FREITAS

Sankofa FAR OUT

8/10

Brazilian pianist's minimalist tribute to his African ancestors



Hailing from the north-eastern Brazilian state of Recife, Amaro Freitas is a wonderfully idiosyncratic jazz

pianist with a devilishly accomplished classical technique. Thematically, his third album explores the ancient philosophies of Black Brazil, but does so by using very precise, repetitive, trance-like compositional structures that invoke the shifting time signatures and additive elements of minimalism. On tracks such as "Cazumbà" and "Ayeye" he plays repeated octaves, at high speed, over fiddly drum and bass grooves; on "Malakoff" he rattles through incredibly complex chord cycles; while "Nascimento" and "Vila Bela" are hypnotic ballads that do this with much more delicacy. **JOHN LEWIS**

BOBBY GILLESPIE & JEHNNY BETH

Utopian Ashes SONY

8/10

Dystopian divorce duets from *Scream and Savages* singers



Pairing most of Primal Scream with Savages singer Beth, *Utopian Ashes* is a loose concept album charting the trials of

a married couple in crisis. It is also the most emotionally mature and fully realised work Gillespie has delivered in years, laying grainy, soulful, impassioned vocals over sumptuously old-school chansons clothed in vintage orchestral country-rock arrangements. The gloriously sardonic waltz-time ballad "English Towns" sounds like Jacques Brel covering Suede, while the ironically cheery sneerfest "Sunk In Reverie" finds Gillespie in classic Jarvis Cocker class-war territory. Sadly, Beth's piercing Gallic voice is underused throughout, but still provides devastating counterpoint on forensic relationship post-mortems such as "Living A Lie". Deliciously bitter chemistry. **STEPHEN DALTON**

Split roles: Jehnni Beth and Bobby Gillespie





Gymjams:
The Go! Team

THE GO! TEAM Get Up Sequences Part One

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

7/10

Brighton sextet's sixth: further adventures in cut 'n' paste carboot funk



The title is a review in itself. *Get Up Sequences... is an unyieldingly upbeat, sonically sunny collection of dayglo melodies and clap-along Northern Soul beats, its positivity all the more remarkable considering – well, you know – and the fact main mover Ian Parton lost his hearing during recording. Trumpets, tambourines and found-sounds compete with Ninja's singalong vocals, in a more-is-more formula little altered since 2004 debut *Thunder, Lightning, Strike*. From opener "Let The Seasons Work" – with its Stereolab-meets-Zappa thrills – to psych-pop earworm "World Remember Me Now", this is raucous, relentless fun; in Parton's own words, a musical "life raft" for shitty times.*

MARK BENTLEY

ETHAN GOLD Earth City 1: The Longing

ELECTRIK GOLD

7/10

First in a planned post-accident comeback trilogy



Perhaps best known for his soundtrack work and for producing Elvis Perkins' 2007 album *Ash Wednesday*,

Ethan Gold recorded just one long-player of his own before suffering a devastating head injury. A decade on, he credits relearning music with helping him "rewire" his brain. The songs on *The Longing* pull from a range of classic rock influences but have a yearning, nostalgic quality in common: the sad Beach Boys swing of "Pretty Girls"; college rock California ghost story "Alexandria And Me"; "Firefly", a tough-love pep talk by way of Tom Petty; and "Storm Coming", which pairs a sweeping universalism with an accordion bridge lifted from The Pogues.

LISA-MARIE FERLA

THE GRID/FRIPP Leviathan

PANEGYRIC

7/10

Pan-generational pop polymaths come together in electric dreams



Seventies art-rock, '80s synthpop and '90s ambient techno converge in this debut full-length collaboration

between veteran prog titan Robert Fripp and evergreen electro duo The Grid, aka Dave Ball and Richard Norris. Over expansive collages of analogue squelch, transistor hum and gently seasick undulation, Fripp uses his guitar as sonic paintbrush, laying down Frippertronic textures that morph from languid throb to icy gleam to discordant avant-classical scrape. The strongest pieces "After The Rain", "Milkwood" and "Loom" feel like mini-movies, full of emotional shading and wordless drama. *Leviathan* sounds deeper and richer with repeat listens, though lesser tracks like "Zhora" and "Sympatico" surrender too easily to tastefully bland ambient mellowness.

STEPHENDALTON

JUNI HABEL All Ears

KOKEPLATE

8/10

Norwegian singer-songwriter makes a virtue of simplicity



There are several reasons why Juni Habel's debut album is so fetching, but the biggest may be the playful aspect

that colours even the most delicate and forlorn songs here. It's a quality that connects her to Joni Mitchell, a hero she further evokes with her fingerpicking style as guitarist and her songs' continual shifts between moments of gentle grace and a brisker tumble of details and feelings. Performed, recorded and produced by Habel at home with a few assists from family members, *All Ears* benefits from great simplicity and clarity of intent, as well as a warmth that's understandably rare among like-styled Nordic folkies who have to cope with those interminable winter eves.

JASON ANDERSON

HORSEY Debonair

UNTITLED

7/10

Thrice neigh: King Krule associates' perverse first



"If not in this shit then where the fuck could happiness be?" bellows Horsey's Archie Marshall on "Sippy Cup", the

infantile two-minute manifesto that leads off the Brixton radicals' debut album. For lovers of vintage Happy Flowers, Lemon Kittens and Earl Brutus misanthropy, or the ur-psych of Tea & Symphony, it's song of the century already, but if *Debonair* cannot keep up that level of "Do The Standing Still" intensity, Horsey's melding of Henry Cow and Barry Manilow throws up plenty of nasty treats: "Underground", "Lagoon" et al. A Residents-style conceptual joke that has already got seriously out of hand.

JIM WIRTH

ANDREW HUNG Devastations

LEX

7/10

Raw analogue realness from Fuck Buttons co-founder



On extended sabbatical from symphonic electro-noise duo Fuck Buttons since 2013, Andrew Hung has

kept busy with multiple soundtracks, collaborations and side projects. Rooted in lo-fi post-punk techno-primitivism, Hung's second solo album is a DIY affair on which he performed and produced every note himself as well as painting the sleeve artwork. On impassioned synth-rock howls such as "Promises" and "Brother", his unpolished vocals invoke the ragged vulnerability of vintage Ian Curtis or Marc Almond. Meanwhile, "Battle" is an artfully dishevelled neo-kraut chugger and "Goodbye" an agreeably wonky blend of analogue bleeps with anguished confessional. Knowingly retro without succumbing to arch pastiche, *Devastations* mostly sounds raw and heartfelt. **STEPHENDALTON**

JACK INGRAM, MIRANDA LAMBERT & JON RANDALL The Marfa Tapes

RCANASHVILLE

8/10

Nashville country trio strip down in some style



The West Texan outpost of Marfa has served as a songwriting retreat for Ingram, Lambert and Randall for six

years now, though this is the first time they've committed ideas to tape. It's a wonderfully tactile set, pared back to just fingerpicked guitar and voices, their verité approach welcoming informal chatter and ambient sounds

of the surrounding high desert. Stripped of its studio gloss, Lambert's 2017 hit "Tin Man" becomes campfire-melancholic. Most everything else is new, ranging from quiet reflection ("The Wind's Just Gonna Blow", "Waxahachie") to gleeful release ("Homegrown Tomatoes", "Two-Step Down To Texas"). **ROBHUGHES**

ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO Mother Nature

UNIVERSAL

8/10

Veteran African diva flies the flag for youth



Lockdown threatened to thwart Kidjo's bold scheme of showcasing a new generation of African singers and rappers

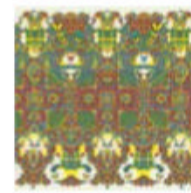
on the 14th studio album of her globe-trotting career. But while she was stranded in a studio in France, technology meant her collaborators were able to record their contributions across three continents – yet nothing feels remotely 'phoned-in' here. The Zimbabwean singer Shungudzo sets a rousing pace on the opener "Choose Me" and Nigeria's Yemi Alade lends her seductive voice to the lush Afro-pop of "Dignity". Nigerian star Burna Boy raps on the infectious "Do Yourself" and his compatriot Mr Eazi duets deliciously on the uplifting "Africa, One Of A Kind". **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

KING GIZZARD AND THE LIZARD WIZARD Butterfly 3000

KGLW

8/10

The Aussie adventurers take yet another left turn on album 18



Ridiculously productive even before last year's lockdowns sent them off the road and into their home

studios, the King Gizzard crew follow last winter's two-part reimmersion in microtonal madness on *KG* and *LW* with their most exuberant outing to date. Intensely rhythmic and unabashedly giddy, the songs here originated as synth loops and arpeggios that were traded and tweaked by bandmates working in isolation. On rave-ready results like "Blue Morpho" and *Butterfly 3000*'s title track, the process essentially dissolves the band's psych-pop and Hawkwind-ian predilections into a pulsating dayglo goo. Purists who flinched when Tame Impala began to morph into a hairier Daft Punk may be



Taking wing:
King Gizzard

similarly nonplussed by the sextet's turn toward blissed-out dance-rock, but everyone else will have a lot of fun.

JASON ANDERSON

MICHAEL LEAGUE
So Many Me GROUNDUP

7/10

Snarky Puppy founder's first solo outing



In a 15-year career making mostly instrumental albums, League's only previous lead vocal was an eight-second

snatch on a David Crosby record. Here he finds his voice on 11 self-penned and highly personal songs about insecurity ("Me Like You"), double lives ("I Wonder Who You Know") and the need for physical contact ("Touch Me"). The latter is particularly pertinent, for the album was recorded in the isolation of lockdown with a laptop and keyboard. The layered synths owe something to Malcolm Cecil and Bob Margoulef's work on Stevie Wonder's '70s albums, while his languid, dreamy, multi-tracked vocals variously evoke Animal Collective, Sade and 10cc. **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

DAMON LOCKS BLACK MONUMENT ENSEMBLE
NOW

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

7/10

Disorientating mini-album from Chicago collective



Veteran Chicago musician Damon Locks leads 11 members of his multi-generational musical collective and

records them under partial lockdown – partly outdoors, partly indoors – using rigorous social distancing. The results are weirdly and pleasingly dislocated: a choir of female voices harmonise and chant over a barrage of Afro-Cuban-style drumming, linked by film dialogue and news interviews that invoke the African-American experience over the past 50 years. Emerging from the heart of this disorientating babel, however, are Angel Bat Dawid's wayward clarinet and Ben LaMar Gay's howling cornet, twin horns that replicate both the collective joy and seething anger of the music. **JOHN LEWIS**

LOS LOBOS
Native Sons NEW WEST

8/10

Legendary LA band cover legendary LA songs



The Buffalo Springfield wrote "For What It's Worth" in response to the Sunset Strip riots in 1965, and nearly 60 years later Los Lobos revitalise the song as subtle commentary on the US border crisis. Mainstays on the LA



I'M NEW HERE

MARINERO

Jess Sylvester reveals the environmental factors that shaped him

Having grown up in a multicultural household – though his parents were raised in California, his maternal grandmother was born in Jalisco, Mexico – 38-year-old Jess Sylvester's music inevitably draws on a rich wealth of influences. "My mom introduced my sister and I to Mexican music just as much as she did Michael Jackson or Paula Abdul," he recalls. "We grew up listening to Trio Los Panchos – they're amazing musicians and masters of three-part harmonies – and Linda Ronstadt's *Canciones De Mi Padre* was a huge hit."

Nonetheless, his Californian roots show, not least in his admiration for the state's most

famous sons, particularly their work between 1966's *Pet Sounds* and 1973's *Holland*.

"I love The Beach Boys," says Sylvester, "and especially that era. When we recorded *Hella Love*, I made my bandmates wear fireman hats in honour of *Smile*. Brian Wilson is a once-in-a-lifetime songwriter. His harmonies are superior to mine, but I put a lot of importance into songwriting, with the chord changes and melodies. A good song is a good song whatever rhythms you use, but I did try to elevate certain Latinx genres by channelling them from my perspective, which happens to be influenced by many artists, including Brian Wilson."

WYNDHAM WALLACE

scene since the early 1970s, the band showcase their wide range on this imaginative and timely covers album, tackling songs by garage rockers like Thee Midnitters, Laurel Canyon singer-songwriters like Jackson Browne, and Chicano composers like Lalo Guerrero. They combine all of those disparate styles on the title track – the album's sole original – a tender valentine to the city they call home. **STEPHEN DEUSNER**

LOUNGE AT THE EDGE OF TOWN
Lounge At The Edge Of Town

THE COMPLETE ATOMIC

6/10

Turin Brakes team up with occasional Mark Hollis associate



Though Olly Knights and Gale Paridjanian first met Phil Ramacon at a Talk Talk tribute concert, signs of that cult

band's experimentalist approach are absent here. Instead, the Lounge... trio – when they swerve from the Turin Brakes style – favour the mellow AOR of the 1970s, with "Can't Look Down" borrowing from Todd Rundgren's "I Saw The Light" and "Bad Dreams" nodding flagrantly to Elton John's "Benny And The Jets". "Eclipse"'s arrangements, meanwhile, suggest a gentle fondness for Wings' "Live And Let Die", though "Zombie" throws a slight curveball, echoing Prince's

"Paisley Park", albeit performed by Supertramp. **WYNDHAM WALLACE**

THE LUV MENAULTS
In Space DORIGHT! MUSIC

6/10

Cosmic exotica from Toronto's soundtrack junkies



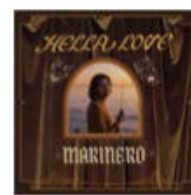
This quartet's day job is scoring Netflix docs, and for their first release on Do Right! – home to the Souljazz Orchestra and other

lights of Canada's soul-funk scene – they've set the controls for intergalactic easy listening, where bleeps, squelches and low-slung grooves dominate. Recorded initially to 1/8" tape, *In Space*'s 12 instrumentals take the popcorn synths of Jean-Jacques Perrey and Gershon Kingsley and send them skywards via motorik breakbeats, buzzsaw psych guitar and cavernous reverb. For all the retro references ("71 Shuttle" is an alternate-universe *Rockford Files* theme), there's a stoner-jam vibe, as "Worf Son Of Mogh Suffers A Spatial Anomaly" makes explicit. A bit cheesy, a lot jokey and much funky fun. **MARK BENTLEY**

MARINERO
Hella Love HARDLY ART

8/10

Mexican American celebrates the hometown he's left behind



Though he's now relocated to Los Angeles, Jess Sylvester's third album was inspired by San Francisco's

Bay Area, but it's also a paean to both the music of California and lands south of the border, including Mexico, home to some of his ancestors. Mariachi flourishes decorate the opening "Fanfare" and "Luz Del Faro", which like "Isle Of Alcatraz", shifts into Tropicalia territory as interpreted by The High Llamas, and *Pet Sounds* harmonies abound elsewhere, not least on "Outerlands". "Through The Fog" and "Maritime", meanwhile, belong on a beach bar jukebox packed with Erasmo Carlos and Marcos Valle singles.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

KEVIN RICHARD MARTIN
Return To Solaris

PHANTOM LIMB

7/10

Dancehall destroyer returns with existential synth explorations



In recent years, Kevin Martin has charted a path away from the dynamite bashment music he made as The Bug and

followed his muse into more ambient realms. *Return To Solaris* is Martin's speculative re-score to *Solaris*, the 1972 sci-fi by Andrei Tarkovsky framed as a sort of Soviet answer to Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. Martin's music pursues an icy ambience, made using an experimental Russian drum machine, the Pulsar-23. "Concrete Tunnels" and "Hari" communicate the cold isolationism of deep space. But deeper in, the album deftly channels the film's themes of memory and consciousness, with "In Love With A Ghost" achieving a kind of terrible beauty. **LOUIS PATTISON**

SCOTT MATTHEWS
New Skin SHEDIO

7/10

Black Country singer-songwriter takes a lightly experimental detour



After six albums of solidly traditional folk-pop, West Midlands singer-songwriter Scott Matthews finally

risks a more contemporary sonic palette on *New Skin*, incorporating light-touch electronics, programmed beats and ambient guitar treatments. In a nutshell, he swaps his early-1970s aesthetic for a glossy mid-'80s makeover on languid, jangly ruminations like "Wait In The Car" and "The Light". But beneath these cosmetic changes, Matthews remains an emphatically old-school troubadour with a deliciously intimate, grainy voice that unashamedly invokes Rufus Wainwright's scuffed-velvet croon and Jeff Buckley's spine-tingling falsetto acrobatics. **STEPHEN DALTON**



"So connected": Sleater-Kinney's Corin Tucker (left) and Carrie Brownstein

SLEATER-KINNEY

Path Of Wellness

MOM+POP

8/10

Wildfires, protests and the second post-reunion album. *By Louis Pattison*



THE post-reunion phase of a rock band's lifespan can be a strange period to navigate. Provided the fans are on board, it is often a chance to make the sort of serious bucks that are out of reach during a band's first flush. But a reunion often lays out an unwritten contract of expectations between band and fans; we want the nostalgia, we want the hits, do it this way, not that way.

In this respect, Sleater-Kinney have not entirely followed the letter of the deal. Their second post-reunion album, 2019's St Vincent-produced *The Center Won't Hold*, felt like a makeover of sorts, the roughness and rage of the band's early days subsumed in a glossy, radio-friendly production that divided critics and fans alike. But the real shock came when, a month before the album's release, drummer Janet Weiss announced she was leaving the band, citing Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker's increasingly exclusive musical partnership: "I said, 'Can you tell me if I am still a creative equal in the band?' And they said no. So, I left."

For a band often used as a byword for feminist solidarity, this sudden intrusion of personal animus came as

a shock. But then, Sleater-Kinney have always been about kicking out against the expectations loaded on women. As Carrie Brownstein has it on "Complex Female Characters", one of the standout tracks from their 10th album *Path Of Wellness*: "You're too much of a woman now/You're not enough of a woman now". It's that old story, so familiar to female musicians: damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Path Of Wellness was written and recorded in the long, hot summer of 2020 in Portland, Oregon, with Brownstein and Tucker assisted by a host of local musicians. It is the first album that Sleater-Kinney have produced entirely by themselves, although that doesn't mean a return to the raw riot-grrrl sound of old. On the contrary, there's a full, rich quality to the record, which is thick with Wurlitzer and Rhodes, and often echoes various genres of a '70s vintage – country and glam, funk and hard rock. The latter, in particular, powers some of the record's best moments. "High In The Grass" is an exultant summertime anthem steeped in the histrionics of '70s rock: "We lock when the pollen's up/We love when the party's on". Wilder still is "Tomorrow's Grave", a knowing tribute to Black Sabbath that makes some entertaining rock theatre out of that band's doom-laden clang.

As *Path Of Wellness* came together, the state of Oregon was in a strange flux, grappling with the pandemic, encroached on by wildfires, and gripped by protests against racial inequality that saw police suppressing crowds with batons and pepper spray. In places the album seems to address this explicitly. "Favorite Neighbor" is a righteous skewering of hypocrisy

that accuses those "putting out fires/When your own house is burning", while "Bring Mercy" finds Tucker singing, "How did we lose our city/Rifles running through our streets..."

Elsewhere, the turbulence outside seems to have brought out a reflective tone. The title track uses the language of self-help and self-care to interrogate personal insecurities, while the sleek, funky "Worry With You" addresses that feeling of anxiety when the shit has hit the fan and the loved one you need is out of reach. Once upon a time, Sleater-Kinney records were righteous and declamatory. More often here, the tone is open and inquisitive, a band trying to find their bearings when the times are a-changin'.

In an interview about her departure from the band, Janet Weiss spoke of the tight relationship between Tucker and Brownstein: "I just think the two of them are so connected and they really agree on almost everything." Listening to this new clutch of songs, you're often reminded of this. Even as *Path Of Wellness* grapples with the world outside, its songs often speak the intimate language of a private conversation – the words of one friend, or lover, to another.

Fans who listened to *The Center Won't Hold* and baulked at its lack of righteous rage might also find moments here wanting. But *Path Of Wellness* proves Corin Tucker and Carrie Brownstein haven't forgotten the empowering, life-giving qualities of rock'n'roll fun. Sleater-Kinney are turning their reunion years into a reaffirmation of the importance of support and solidarity on a private, personal level. As they sing on album closer "Bring Mercy": "If it's coming for us, darlin'/Take my hand and dance me down the line".

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Path Of Wellness
- 2 High In The Grass
- 3 Worry With You
- 4 Method
- 5 Shadow Town
- 6 Favorite Neighbor
- 7 Tomorrow's Grave
- 8 No Knives
- 9 Complex Female Characters
- 10 Down The Line
- 11 Bring Mercy

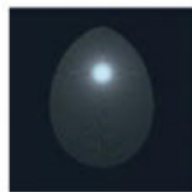
Produced by: Corin Tucker, Carrie Brownstein

Recorded at: Halfling Studio, Portland

Personnel: Corin Tucker (guitar, vocals), Carrie Brownstein (guitar, vocals, keys), Bill Athens (bass), Galen Clark (clavinet, Wurlitzer, Rhodes), Vince Li Rocchi (percussion, drums), Brian Koch (drums), Angie Boylan (drums)

IAN McNABB
Utopian FAIRFIELD

8/10

Icicle Works man still cool and spiky

McNabb's jukebox brain is firing on all synapses on this 13th solo release, mining myriad musical styles and making salient points about the state of the world. High-up hucksters in corridors of power are pilloried on the grunge funk of "No One Tells A Lie Like A Dude With A Tie", the spirits of both Neil Young and ELO inhabit the maverick strum of "The Outlaw", while "YOLO" takes its lead from the slick jazz and quick wit of Steely Dan. Other highlights include the sombre piano ballad "Harry Dean Stanton" and the uplifting romantic reminiscences of "You Bring Good Things". **TERRY STAUNTON**

SHANNON McNALLY
The Waylon Sessions

COMPASS/BLUEROSE

8/10

Exemplary covers of Jennings-centric standards

McNally has been a largely unheralded treasure these past two decades, issuing a stream of fine roots albums and collaborating with the likes of Son Volt, Terry Allen and Rodney Crowell. Her take on Waylon Jennings' recorded catalogue is superb, offering fresh angles on these well-thumbed songs without sacrificing their outlaw country credentials. Buddy Miller joins her for "You Asked Me To" and ace honky-tonk two-stepper "Black Rose"; Crowell guests on his own trouble-dodging classic "I Ain't Living Long Like This"; Waylon's widow Jessi Colter pitches up on the wistfully tender "Out Among The Stars". **ROBHUGHES**

MEGA BOG
Life, And Another SNOWBALL

8/10

Oddball alt.folk that explores curious musical corners

Recorded in an array of studios with nearly a dozen collaborators – including James Krivchenia of Big Thief – *Life, And Another* is held together by the vocal prowess of Erin Birgy, AKA Mega Bog. This is her fifth album, and the sound touches on everything from Weimer-era dramatics ("Butterfly") to folk whimsy ("Obsidian Lizard"), the thundering bedlam of "Bull Of Heaven" to swampy tendrils of synth on "Station To Station". Elsewhere are beautiful Eno-esque instrumental "Darmok" and the relatively accessible sax-driven "Crumb Back", which sounds like a fusion between Squeeze and the E Street Band. Wonderfully eclectic and strangely uplifting. **PETER WATTS**

PARKER MILLSAP
Be Here Instead

THIRTY TIGERS

7/10

Adventurous fifth album from Oklahoma troubadour

Stuck at home in Nashville, Millsap has used enforced confinement to upgrade his gritty folk troubadour shtick into something considerably more expansive. Stadium rock grandeur ("Dammit"), psych-soul ("Vulnerable") and off-kilter piano ballads ("Empty") join more familiar acoustic guitar tropes ("In Between"). At the same time, his lyrics have grown more introspective, and best of all is "The Real Thing", which sums up the last year in three pungent minutes – it started as a song about missing his wife while on the road and ended up about being starved of human interaction for an entirely different reason. **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

MODEST MOUSE
The Golden Casket

COLUMBIA

7/10

An untypical rail against the modern condition

Those in thrall to Modest Mouse's well-honed blend of ramshackle punk-folk and predilection for dispensing off-grid wisdom will find much favour with the latest addition to their canon. Across *The Golden Casket's* 12 tracks, Issac Brock laments the ever-widening gulf between nature and technology, and the insidious evils of a cultural (and literal) atmosphere swimming with invisible signals. This 21st-century anxiety is reflected across the unstable arrangements of "We Are Between" and "Wooden Soldiers", before reaching a conceptual pinnacle with "Transmitting Receiving". Elsewhere, quirkier constructs, such as "Never Fuck A Spider On The Fly", emit an ominous menace. **ANDREW PRICE**

THE MOUNTAIN GOATS
Dark In Here

MERGE

8/10

Muscle Shoals-recorded 20th from John Darnielle's men

Made in FAME Studios as Covid turned the lights off in the US, this crepuscular companion to last year's brighter, Memphis-made *Getting Into Knives* explores a country on the edge of cracking up. The title track is insinuating and implacable, snaking over a tough beat as John Darnielle recounts reckonings and oaths. Down in this song's place of cool threat, it's "dark as a coalmine/filling up with gas/

REVELATIONS**MEGA BOG****Erin Birgy** "I started cracking open"

Creating the follow-up to 2019's wondrous *Dolphine* proved an intense experience for Erin Birgy, aka Mega Bog. The vivid, allusive songs on *Life, And Another* were largely written in a secluded New Mexico cabin, immersed in her natural surroundings.

"All of my unchecked projections about who I am, the idealised anarchism/balance of the universe, or how I believe the world should work, really had space to be explored," Birgy explains. "So in the dusty little house on the Rio Grande, with all the critters who shared it with me, I started cracking open in a way I'd always wanted, but wasn't quite

prepared for. I felt very unsafe, scared of myself and everything around me. A few times a week I would feel compelled to get a gun because I was just so unsettled being out there."

Birgy's writing took on a transformative power, guided by *Weight Of The Earth, On Paper*, a luminous collection of tape journals from the late artist, writer and activist David Wojnarowicz: "I was living out very similar moments to those he wrote about. It was kind of like that outside validation, but from a ghost who could have been me. I knew I was going to die, but I was going to say a lot in the meantime."

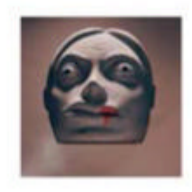
ROBHUGHES

I stand ready for the blast". Spooner Oldham, meanwhile, drops limpid Hammond into the band's sultry funk and jagged jazz. Whether observing modern Manson cults gathering "silent as a snowdrift" in the hills, or delivering a sunrise eulogy bearing David Berman away, Darnielle's sympathy never fails. **NICK HASTED**

MUSEUM OF LOVE
Life Of Mammals

SKINT

7/10

James Murphy mixes second album by the LCD Soundsystem spinoff

On the duo's follow-up to their 2014 self-titled debut as Museum Of Love, Soundsystem drummer Pat Mahoney and DFA associate Dennis McNany display an impressive panache as they flit from the sleek propulsion of *Life Of Mammals'* title track to Bowie-in-Berlin simulations like "Cluttered World" to the dub soul of "Army Of

Children". Channeling both Scott Walker and a louche John Foxx, Mahoney proves to be as compelling in frontman mode as he is behind his kit. **JASON ANDERSON**

JEB LOY NICHOLS
Jeb Loy

TIMMION

7/10

Mellow gold from Welsh-based, Wyoming-born songwriter

Nichols has been perfecting a smooth-groove blend of Southern soul and folk for 25 years now. The Timmion label's

house band, Cold Diamond & Mink, provide artful back-up on *Jeb Loy*, which sustains itself with intimations of home, family and the restorative power of nature. Horns, Hammond organ and judicious guitar warm the grain of Nichols' inviting voice, which sounds for all the world like a Memphis JJ Cale on "Like A Rainy Day" or the elegant "Living It Up". **ROBHUGHES**



Yola: amazing voice meets pop nous and political nuance

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Barely Alive
- 2 Dancing Away In Tears
- 3 Diamond Studded Shoes
- 4 Be My Friend
- 5 Great Divide
- 6 Starlight
- 7 If I Had To Do It All Again
- 8 Now You're Here
- 9 Whatever You Want
- 10 Break The Bough
- 11 Like A Photograph
- 12 Stand For Myself

Produced by:

Dan Auerbach

Recorded at:

Easy Eye Sound, Nashville, TN

Personnel:

Yola Carter (vocals), Dan Auerbach (guitar, percussion), Sam Bacco (perc), Tom Bukovac (guitar), Aaron Frazer (drums), Nick Movshon (bass), Ray Jacildo (organ, vibraphone, glockenspiel), Russ Pahl (guitar), Milke Rojas (keys), Billy Sanford (guitar), Bobby Wood (keys), Andy Gabbard (backing vocals), Matt Combs (strings), Raymond Mason (horns), Ashley Wilcoxson, Brandi Carlile (backing vocals), Dan Dugmore (steel guitar), Alfreda McCrary, Ann McCrary, Regina McCrary (backing vocals)

Bruno Mars) and drummer Aaron Frazer (Durand Jones & The Indication). Together, they drape these songs in the finery of '70s soul, funk, even disco. *Stand For Myself* is a headphones album, lovingly written, arranged and produced. Yola takes no small joy in rummaging around pop history to find sounds that bolster, contradict or simply complicate her songs. "Whatever You Want" stomps and swaggers like early-'70s Stones, while "Like A Photograph" shimmers like a sweet-nothings ballad off a mid-career Dusty album.

With its Studio 54 drumbeat and Philly Soul horns, "Dancing Away In Tears" namechecks Neil Sedaka's "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" and Doc Pomus's "Save The Last Dance For Me" without sounding overly clever, as though pop music offers some salve against the wounds inflicted by the larger world. It's not just a standout on the album, but one of the finest moments in Yola's catalogue so far, beautifully orchestrated and perfectly sung: a testament to pop and soul music's ability to break and heal a heart.

After the pandemic derailed her plans for 2020 – an arena tour with The Black Keys and Chris Stapleton, a starring role as Sister Rosetta Tharpe in Baz Luhrmann's Elvis Presley biopic – Yola found inspiration in her mother's old record collection, which means her pop references are personal. She uses her voice differently, downplaying some of the bigger moments to emphasise the nuance in her voice. And, working with co-writers like Tasjan, Natalie Hemby and Ruby Amanfu, she wields the word "we" like a sword. Her songs toggle between the singular and the plural, the private and the communal. These songs are pointed in their plurality, as though speaking to and for such a wide swathe of listeners is itself a subversive act. *Standing For Myself* makes the political personal, the personal political.

By balancing pop and politics, Yola always sounds like she's in the trenches herself, always mustering the courage and energy to keep fighting. Ultimately, this is an album about how an "I" becomes an "us", about how the artist cannot survive without her audience. "Thought that I could play the hero on my own", she sings on "If I Had To Do It All Again", bolstered by a stuttering drumbeat and undercut by a stabbing electric guitar. "But without you, I just don't know who to save".

YOLA

Stand For Myself

EASY EYESOUND

8/10

Pop, soul, outrage and joy...
By Stephen Deusner



RARELY does a protest song sound quite as sceptical as "Diamond Studded Shoes", the first single from Yola Carter's second full-length,

Stand For Myself. It's an anthem for the downtrodden, a call to arms for anyone pushed aside or trampled under, but even the ratatat chorus warns them not to get their hopes up: "We know it isn't, it ain't gonna turn out right!" Contrasting the fatalism of those lyrics is the exuberance of the music, with its rollicking guitar licks and rolling pace sounding like JJ Cale covering The Staple Singers' "Freedom Highway". The song, co-written with Aaron Lee Tasjan and produced by Dan Auerbach, nods to pop history without settling on any one particular sound or style to get its point across. And then there's Yola's voice, one of the mightiest in pop music today. She locates a midpoint between the lyrics' smothering worry and the music's visceral joy, and when she hits the big, dramatic notes, she sacrifices neither nuance nor intimacy. As a result, *Stand For Myself* never really sounds like

a protest album: it's lush instead of austere, joyous as well as outraged.

Even before she released her first solo EP, "Orphan Offering", in 2016, Yola had lived many musical lives, first in a series of rock bands that could never make a good place for her. A vocalist for hire, she collaborated with groups like Massive Attack and Bugz In The Attic, all while fronting the Bristol-based band Phantom Limb. In the 2010s, however, she crossed the Atlantic, settled in Nashville, and signed with Dan Auerbach's Easy Eye Sound label. They worked together on her debut album, 2019's *Walk Through Fire*, although the rounded edges of his production made it sound as much like an Auerbach project as a Yola LP.

She dispels that impression on *Stand For Myself*, primarily by going bigger. Again she recorded with Auerbach at his Easy Eye Sound studio, using a small battalion of veteran session players like Bobby Wood, Billy Sanford and gospel greats The McCrary Sisters. There were a few newcomers as well, including bassist Nick Movshon (Amy Winehouse,

"A BITCH IS BACK"

Yola on her new album

"THE album is like a window into my mind, my life experiences, my politics, my hopeful and sentimental sides, and my hope for humanity at large. I want to be an example of nuance, because the media does not want to portray [black women] in a way that is nuanced. Often people come out all guns blazing and they don't navigate

nuance. Instead of punching out of the gate with absolutely everything I have, I'm going to really try and navigate nuance.

"I studied my creative process to the point where I knew what kind of state my brain needed to be in to generate ideas and knew what time of day my ideas turn up, and so the whole process was, 'OK, I'm going to start writing some things now explicitly for this record.' I wasn't seeing anybody

and I was just staying up until five o'clock in the morning until my brain was really fuzzy and hazy and then ideas would just jump out.

"I've been proven through this fire and I'm back to where I started, the real me. I kind of got talked out of being me and now I'm here. This is who I've always been in music and in life. There was a little hiatus where I got brainwashed out of my own majesty, but a bitch is back."

CHARLIE PARR
Last Of Better Days Ahead

SMITHSONIANFOLKWAYS

8/10

Worried-man blues from an instrumental ventriloquist



On Charlie Parr's 13th album – produced by Brad Cook (Waxahatchee, Hiss Golden Messenger) – his acoustic guitar rarely sounds like an acoustic guitar. He slurs it like a pedal steel on “Blues For Whitefish Lake, 1975”, makes it shimmer like a dulcimer on the refugee epic “Rain”, turns it into a full band on “Anaconda”. His playing style is frenzied yet precise, imaginative yet earthy, which contrasts his harried vocals and his detail-dense lyrics. Like John Hartford jamming with St Francis of Assisi, Parr strikes a fine balance between immense generosity toward humanity and barely contained outrage toward humanity's tendency towards coldness and conformity.

STEPHENEUSNER

PORTICO QUARTET
Terrain

GONDWANA

7/10

Sixth album from London-based instrumental ensemble



After experimenting with guest vocalists and techno beats, lockdown forced Portico's Duncan Bellamy and Jack Wyllie into a more minimalist approach. The influence of Terry Riley and Steve Reich, Japanese composer Midori Takada, Jan Garbarek's New Age sonic sculptures and a glacial touch of Sigur Rós are all evident in a three-part suite in which hypnotically repeated steelpan-style patterns played on the hang unfold slowly as saxophone, piano and synth strings add texture to the ambience. The “terrain” explored is both external and internal, tranquil and troubling.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

RED RIBBON

Planet X COLLECTIVE

8/10

A search for truth results in a sublime listening experience



If you're new to Emma Danner's exhilarating aural adventures then Planet X, her second record in the guise of Red Ribbon, is a good place to start. Showcasing the many shades of Red Ribbon's idiosyncratic sound, Planet X finds Seattle-based Danner, backed by her troupe of multi-instrumentalists, on a thematic search for meaning. They traverse the ominous, distorted sludge of “Way”, the gloriously hypnotic, sun-drenched “Renegade”, the brooding melancholia of “High” and the moody title track, which sounds like Pixies fronted by Lana Del Rey. It's an enriching listen.

ANDREW PRICE

SISTER JOHN
I Am By Day

LAST NIGHT FROM GLASGOW

7/10

Exile on Sauchiehall Street: Weedgie ultras' stylish third



Pop classicists with a nose for stylish period touches, Sister John channel the sounds of their native Glasgow with panache, Amanda McKeown's songs melding the uptown pop of Texas and Aztec Camera with the fey glimmer of Orange Juice. Their third LP, I Am By Day throws in the odd curveball – the Average White Band riff on “What I Want”, the hand-cranked trip-hop of “How Can I Keep It Alive?” – but Sister John's strongest suit remains the crooked indie-pop of “The Sound Of You” or “Strange Ideas”: a high-street makeover for the big music of Glasgow neighbours The Delgados.

JIM WIRTH

EARL SLICK
Fist Full Of Devils

SCHNITZEL

6/10

Bowie guitarist returns with his first solo album since 2003



Slick's previous solo record, Zig Zag, featured guest vocals from the likes of Bowie, Robert Smith and Joe Elliot. By contrast, Fist Full Of Devils is a double album of instrumentals, which veer from spaghetti western themes (“Bad Brew”), exploratory epics (“Vanishing Point”) and the tender “Emerald”. Slick's playing is fantastic and there is considerable musical variety on display, but many of the best moments come in the interplay between Slick's guitar and pianist Al Marz, whose jazzy melodies sit in the place a vocalist might otherwise occupy and contrast neatly with Slick's more bluesy approach.

SLY & ROBBIE
Red Hills Road

TAXI

6/10

First album from Jamaican duo in seven years



After half a century as the most prolific “riddim twins” in the business, Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare have slowed up as they approach their seventies, and Red Hills Road is their first LP together since 2014's Dubrising. This is not so much a dub record as an exercise in Jamaican musical history from mento (“Coronation Market”) to dancehall (“Haul And Pull Up”) with plenty of righteous roots reggae vibes in between. Snatches of half-familiar melodies drift in and out of the synth-heavy rhythmic undergrowth and there's a pleasingly raw and earthy feel throughout.

SQUIRREL FLOWER
Planet (i)

FULL TIME HOBBY

8/10

Second album reveals a dark inner world



Ella Williams spent much of her debut album as Squirrel Flower in motion, underwater or on the road. What's striking

about the follow-up is how much of it is the opposite. “Flames And Flat Tires” was the soundtrack to a quarantine summer, locked down in the burning Bristol where she recorded the album with Ali Chant; “Hurt A Fly” finds her adopting the persona of a violent, gaslighting ex. The title is Williams' name for the world in which her music is set and it's one where disaster looms large – dark, evocative and minor-key rich; menacing live drums and corkscrew bass hanging heavy in the atmosphere.

SUNROOF
Electronic Music Improvisations Volume 1

MUTE PARALLEL SERIES

7/10

Depeche Mode's backroom boys explore their very own radiophonic workshop



A longtime off-duty hobby and sporadic remix alias for Mute Records founder Daniel Miller and veteran Depeche Mode producer-engineer Gareth Jones, Sunroof finally make their official album debut with this collection of fizzing, buzzing, squelching, crackling, pulsing analogue audioscapes. Recorded live with no rehearsal or pre-planning, these compact compositions inevitably risk straying into noodling self-indulgence at times. But in general, inspiration trumps masturbation, with the snappily titled “1.4 – 18.6.19” vividly mashing broken organ chords into luminous rhythmic chatter, while the majestic finale “1.8 – 2.3.19” somehow manages to infuse its stampeding blast of circuit-bending bleeptronica with a stirring undertow of romantic yearning. Some private hobbies are worth sharing.

STEPHENDALTON

HOW TO BUY...

{ CHARLIE PARR }
A path through the man's country blues



When The Devil Goes Blind

NERO'S NEPTUNE, 2010

A prolific songwriter from Duluth, Parr takes an

irreverent approach to American folk and blues traditions, not unlike another certain folkie from Minnesota. On his first LP recorded in a professional studio instead of his home or yard or wherever, the past is a playground, where truth is pliable and everything is raw material for weird, wiry songs such as “Mastodon”. 8/10



Stumpjumper

REDHOUSE, 2015

After self-releasing several albums, Parr signed with the

Minnesota label Red House and released his first album with a full band. Produced by Brad Cook, it retains his ramshackle aesthetic, as though every sound emanates from that hole in his guitar. Parr tackles the old murder ballad “Delia”, but the best moments are his own philosophical tunes about local rivers and old trucks. 9/10



Dog

REDHOUSE, 2017

Parr wrote most of this album while walking his

dog. Just as he let his beloved pet pick their routes, he let these songs choose their own paths. He ponders depression on “Sometimes I'm Alright” and empathy on the title track: “How do you know I don't have a soul”, the dog asks the human. Or maybe the human asks the dog. 8/10



Parr: rockin'... kind of

SHELLY MOSMAN



DISCOVERED

Searching out the best albums new to *Uncut*

JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN

I Would Not Live Always RIVERLEA

8/10

Young Dubliner brokers the ancient and modern on captivating debut. *By Rob Hughes*



THE first song that John Francis Flynn learnt to sing was “Come, Me Little Son”,

from a version by The Dubliners’ Luke Kelly. Based around a Scottish air, it was initially written and recorded by Ewan MacColl for the BBC’s celebrated radio ballads series in the late ’50s. It’s tempting to speculate what the notoriously dogmatic MacColl would make of Flynn’s experimental approach to traditional music, but he’d surely struggle to deny its power.

The 31-year-old is the latest addition to River Lea, the folk imprint set up by Rough Trade to promote “beautiful and strange traditional music from Britain, Ireland and beyond”. Flynn has been a vital presence in Dublin’s young folk scene this past decade, both as frontman with Skipper’s Alley and as collaborator with the likes of Ye Vagabonds and Lankum. A well-received support slot on the latter’s 2019 UK tour brought him wider attention, though the idea of being what he calls “this professional musician” didn’t fully take hold until River Lea offered a deal.

I Would Not Live Always is an extraordinary debut by any standard. Rooted in traditional song, Flynn uses the source material to fool around with form, framing his rich, sonorous voice

in abstract drones, loops and electronic patter. Crucially too, he’s chosen to balance out his studio band with some non-trad musicians, chiefly producer Brendan Jenkinson on synths/ electric guitar and drummer/ synth player Ross Chaney, who also creates distinctive loops from a Tascam portastudio.

The effect is ravishingly eerie, particularly on “Bring Me Home”, a porous three-part suite that gradually darkens into an urgent storm and on into an oppressive form of hovering static. Part one is an anguished version of “The Dear Irish Boy”, a study in loss as much as belonging. Murky clouds descend on “I Would Not Live Always”, a repeated verse from an old Lutheran hymn, Flynn’s voice keeping faith against a cantering groove and a wriggly synth. The final segment is “An Buachaillín Ban”, a Gaelic translation of “The Dear Irish Boy”, beautifully recited by Saileog Ní Ceannabháin.

The most moving moment is the eight-minute “Shallow Brown”, a West Indian sea shanty and slave song dating back to the 19th century. Flynn plumbs a pit of despair from the vantage point of a man bidding farewell to his lover as his ship pulls from port. “Master’s going to sell me/Sell me to a Yankee/Sell me for a dollar”, he sings, deep and mournful over picked guitar. As he slowly recedes from view, pipes build into a disquieting buzz, with Flynn’s

words cut and looped into inscrutable fragments on the wind.

Comparable in length is Flynn’s take on “Come, Me Little Son”, in which a fretful child – bemoaning the prolonged absence of his father, forced to provide for his family by working on motorways in England – is soothed by his mother. It’s one of two Ewan MacColl songs, the other being the tender “Cannily, Cannily”.

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Lovely Joan
- 2 Cannily, Cannily
- 3 My Son Tim
- 4 Tralee Gaol
- 5 Shallow Brown
- 6 Chaney’s Tape Dream
- 7 Bring Me Home Pt 1 (The Dear Irish Boy)
- 8 Bring Me Home Pt 2 (I Would Not Live Always)
- 9 Bring Me Home Pt 3 (An Buachaillín Ban)
- 10 Come, Me Little Son

Produced by:

Brendan Jenkinson
Recorded at: Oxford Lane Studio and Sonic Studio, Dublin

Personnel:

John Francis Flynn (vocals, whistles, guitars), Ross Chaney (drums, Tascam, synthesiser), Brendan Jenkinson (synthesiser, clarinet, electric guitar), Ultan O’Brien (fiddle), Phil Christie (keyboards), Consuelo Bresci (additional vocals), Saileog Ní Ceannabháin (additional vocals)

This time, the predominant feature is a droning fiddle, courtesy of Flynn’s Skipper’s Alley bandmate Ultan O’Brien.

The work of Shirley and Dolly Collins is a key influence on the album too. Flynn’s adaptation of “Lovely Joan”, originally collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams more than a century ago, is styled on the sisters’ 1968 recording. Essentially the tale of a lusty blowhard outwitted by the female object of his desire, its inventive arrangement – ripples of electronica, pastoral guitar and shape-shifting synthetics – is a tribute to Dolly’s daring on portative organ. The effect is exquisite, softening the song’s archaic folk vernacular into something more hallucinatory and accessible.

Flynn is also a consummate guitar player, flautist and dab hand on tin whistle. A dazzling version of “Tralee Gaol” finds him negotiating two whistles at a time, coaxing a feverish polka from one while maintaining a low drone from the other, his close intakes of breath falling into the rhythm. The tune finds both a contrast and companion in the album’s other instrumental, “Chaney’s Tape Dream”. Here, he extemporises over Ross Chaney’s low textural hum, looped and processed from another of Flynn’s piping sorties.

In keeping with River Lea’s foraging spirit – shared with cohorts Lisa O’Neill, Ye Vagabonds and Brighde Chaimbeul, all of whom offer distinct variants on habitual folk practice – *I Would Not Live Always* offers a singular and striking clarity of vision. Flynn might just be the label’s most significant find thus far.

Q&A

John Francis Flynn on discovering his voice

How did you go about reclaiming these traditional songs?

From my perspective, certain songs require different treatments. The lyrics are quite antiquated on some of the material, and how I connect with them informs the arrangements. “Lovely Joan”, for example, represented this weird kind of fairytale-scape for me, so I wanted to put that into a floaty, dreamlike kind of space.

How much of this album has been a voyage of discovery for you?

Having grown up playing traditional instrumental music, it wasn’t until I was 19 or 20 that I really discovered

the singing aspect. I got hooked on The Watsons, which was the gateway into it. This is my first solo project, so it’s a culmination of the last 10 years of singing these traditional songs and finding new and exciting sounds separate from that. It’s been a real exploration.

What made you finally go solo?

I was just going with the flow for years, playing music and doing the band thing. I always had an idea in the back of my head that I’d make a solo album, but there are lots of traditional players who record one without ever considering themselves as professional musicians. They’re primary school teachers or bankers who do it for the craic. Though to be fair I wasn’t doing anything else, so I had no excuse really!

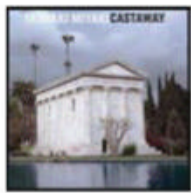
INTERVIEW: ROB HUGHES

TASHAKI MIYAKI

Castaway METROPOLIS

7/10

Los Angeles dream-pop trio's bittersweet second



With their songs' fuzz-laden prettiness and the breathy intimacy of singer Paige Stark's delivery, Tashaki Miyaki's

brand of mellow can feel like a sunnier, more melodic West Coast counterpart to Khruangbin's laconic Texas cool. The traces of girl-group balladry and Byrdsian jangle throughout *Castaway* add a quintessentially LA quality to the trio's second album even as standouts "Help Me" and "I Feel Fine" see them fill in the dotted line that connects The Jesus And Mary Chain back to the Paris Sisters. The addition of strings on "U" and other judiciously applied adornments to Tashaki Miyaki's template make the ache in Stark's voice all the sweeter. **JASON ANDERSON**

TEKE::TEKE

Shirushi KILLROCKSTARS

7/10

Pile-driving mutant Japanese garage-rock



Teke::Teke are a genre-splicing firecracker, from the mordant fuzz overture of "Kala Kala" to the Tarantino-awaiting

'60s soundtrack melodrama of "Yoru Ni". Damon Albarn's East Asian adventures come to mind, as ska brass, aching Japanese enka balladry and lumbering riffs all find a home. Singer Maya Kuroki's woozy, husky intimacies, meanwhile, rev into punk exhortations. "Meikyu" is the epic climax to this approach, jackhammer beats and surf swirl morphing into chamber-psychedelic guitar, before stampeding into an explosive brass-and flute-flecked freakout. This would be a priceless actual Japanese psych 7", and if Shirushi's relentless momentum can leave you breathless, it batters its way into real, mutant rock'n'roll thrills. **NICK HASTED**

EMMA-JEAN THACKRAY

Yellow WARP/MOVEMENTT

9/10

Funky, loved-up debut from rising London jazz trumpeter



For someone who can be amusingly gobby and confrontational in concert, Emma-Jean Thackray's debut LP is a surprisingly loved-up collection – check out the Rotary Connection harmonies of "Third Eye", the Alice Coltrane-like happy-clappy organ rave of "Yellow", or the Hindu-themed spiritual soul of "Rahu Ketu".

As a trumpeter, Thackray switches between scribbly *Bitches Brew*-style flourishes and Freddie Hubbard-style modalism, but she's also a surprisingly soulful singer who knows how to

construct a palpitating groove. Some of the best moments here are her twitchy funk miniatures, driven by tuba basslines, distorted Fender Rhodes riffs and chant-based vocals, which leave you wanting more. **JOHN LEWIS**

UB40

Bigga Baggariddim SHOESTRING

6/10

Brummie reggae legends round up some heavy legends



Back in 1985, UB40 released an album called *Baggariddim*, on which guests such as Pato Banton and Dillinger helped

the band reimagine old songs. *Bigga Baggariddim* does a similar job, reworking the rhythms of their 2019 album *For The Many* with global collaborators that include New Zealand's House Of Shem on three tracks and India's General Zooz plus veterans Inner Circle and Winston Francis. For the most part, it's classic roots-rock reggae with a vintage '70s warmth, but new young Jamaican heroes BLVK H3RO and Leno Banton lend a more contemporary dancehall/hip-hop edge to "Whatever Happened To The Have Nots" and "Show And Prove". **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

UNWED SAILOR

Truth Or Consequences SPARTAN

7/10

Indie-rock veterans continue a post-resurgence creative burst



Band founder and sole constant Jonathan Ford hails from the so-called Chrindie (Christian indie) scene in America as a

former member of mathy hardcore outfit Roadside Monument and beloved sadcore mainstay Pedro The Lion. The bass-forward, largely instrumental project Unwed Sailor, which he formed in the late '90s, has inhabited many sonic forms over the years. But their current shape – a rich tapis blending post-punk touchstones with the spirit of DIY indie – might be the best. *Truth Or Consequences* balances at the precipice of nostalgia without toppling over. At once organic and insistent, romantic and clear-eyed, it commands attention without trying too hard. **ERIN OSMON**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

May The Circle Remain Unbroken: A Tribute To Roky Erickson LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

7/10

An idiosyncratic influencer remembered



Emma-Jean Thackray



Relentless hooks: Wolf Alice

WOLF ALICE

Blue Weekend RCA

8/10

Quartet's prowess is proved on storming third album



"I am what I am, and I'm good at it", Ellie Rowsell declares on "Smile", the lead single and pivotal track on Wolf



Linchpin of Texas psych pioneers the 13th Floor Elevators, Erickson was still an inspiration to others at the time of his

death in 2019, and his name attracts an array of high-profile contributors to this posthumous salute. Lucinda Williams delivers her trademark saloon growl on early garage gem "You're Gonna Miss Me", but there's a bigger surprise to Margo Price grooving out of her comfort zone and going full-on rock chick for "Red Temple Prayer (Two-Headed Dog)". Roky's less complicated, tender side is well served by Jeff Tweedy's reverential "For You (I'd Do Anything)", although it's Chelsea Wolfe's spooky Southern gothic makeover of "If You Have Ghosts" that just edges ahead of all the above. **TERRY STAUNTON**

THE WALLFLOWERS

Exit Wounds

NEW WEST

7/10

Now 51, Bob and Sara's youngest is his own man on his 10th LP



The Byrds and Buffalo Springfield songs Jakob Dylan covered on 2018's *Echo Of The Canyon* soundtrack seem to have

inspired his decision to make the first Wallflowers LP in nine years "a full-band electric record". Assembling an all-new lineup, Dylan enlisted skilful producer/guitarist Butch Walker to make his songs sparkle. Framed by the pandemic lament "Maybe Your Heart's Not In It No More" and the demimonde-dwelling "The Daylight Between Us", *Exit Wounds* rocks with smouldering intensity, from the us-against-the-world ballad "Darlin' Hold On" to the springy, Clash-inspired "Move The River", two of four duets with a disarmingly spontaneous Shelby Lynne. The LP's muscular hooks and unpretentious formalism provide Dylan with the ideal settling for his assured wordplay and signature stoicism. **BUD SCOPPA**

Alice's new record. It's a self-assured declaration that is manifest across the run time, with Rowsell and co continuing to expand on the wide sonic remit established in 2017's *Visions Of A Life*. *Blue Weekend* is a collection of songs that immediately dazzle, with a relentless array of strong hooks, nestled within a sea of diverse sonic colours. Opener "Beach" is a tender lo-fi beginning that evolves into a hymn-like overture, and while "Delicious Things" and the robust riffage of "Smile" remind us of the band's formidable teeth, further arrangements demonstrate similar aptitude in more vivid and tranquil realms. **ANDREW PRICE**

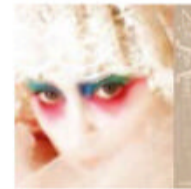
ZOEE

Flaw Flower

LEGAL DATA

7/10

London singer's wilfully exotic debut



If Zoe's shrill soprano sounds familiar it's because she – Harriet Zoe Pittard – provided the voice for PC Music's

hyperpop novelty hit "Hey QT" back in 2014. Seven years later, she carries herself with the eccentric air of Cyndi Lauper on her debut *Flaw Flower*, but deep down these fanciful songs are more conventional than they might appear, particularly the tilted pop of "Microwave" and "Evening Primrose". Affairs of the heart dominate her thoughts – "Best Man Speech" is a diary passage that should curl toes but doesn't, while "The Empty Glass" and "The Flowering Corpse" are wrapped in elegantly spangled guitars. **PIERS MARTIN**



REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS

ALICE COLTRANE

Kirtan: Turiya Sings

IMPULSE

Turiya's divine songs and infinite chants pared back, repackaged and empowered. *By Richard Williams*

THE recent popularity of Alice Coltrane's music among a new generation of listeners can be a puzzle to longtime admirers of her late husband's work. A distinguished John Coltrane scholar who teaches at an American university told me earlier this year that, while his students are extremely enthusiastic about Alice, they listen to John and don't understand what the fuss was about. And one of the less ecstatic reviews of the recent *Floating Points/Pharoah Sanders* album observed that the music seemed to be doing little more than trying to replicate the mood of Alice's recordings at their most trance-like and undemanding. Yet from the work of her nephew Steven Ellison (*Flying Lotus*) to explicit homages paid by Paul Weller, Laura Veirs, Sunn O))) and others, the textures and flavours of the albums Alice made between her husband's death in 1967 and her own departure for other planes of being in 2007 are now a common resource, forming a part of the fabric of modern music and an object of reverence for exponents and admirers of "spiritual jazz".

What does the enthusiasm for spiritual jazz really amount to? A sceptic would say that its protagonists are looking for

REISSUE
OF THE
MONTH
7/10

an easy way to enjoy or play jazz, entering through a gate beyond which lies little of the challenge that characterised the music of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman and, of course, John Coltrane himself, whose late work will provoke heated arguments for as long as people still listen to recorded jazz.

But it was Alice's husband who can be credited with laying the foundations for spiritual jazz – not least with a composition called "Spiritual", included on an album called *Coltrane "Live" At The Village Vanguard* in 1961. The grave incantation of its slow, hymn-like melody by Coltrane's tenor saxophone established a mood of solemn meditation that he would develop over the ensuing four years and into his masterpiece, *A Love Supreme*, which countless other artists, from Pharoah Sanders to Jan Garbarek

and Kamasi Washington, would take as the basis of their personal explorations.

Alice McLeod and John Coltrane were married in 1965, when she was a modern jazz pianist with a minor reputation and he was receiving global acclaim. She replaced McCoy Tyner as the "classic quartet" broke up and a new lineup veered into freer and more expansive, exploratory realms that were seemingly influenced by John's experiences with ➤



Forever searching:
Alice Coltrane
performing at the
Hague's North Sea
Jazz Festival, 1987





Coltrane: drawing the listener into solitary devotion

LSD, as well as by a search for spiritual fulfilment already made explicit in album titles such as *Meditations* and *Ascension*. By this time, John was allowing even semi-pro musicians to join the band on stage and occasionally prefacing a performance with the Sanskrit chant of Om-mani-padme-hum. To some, the presence of Alice was an unwelcome symbol of the break with the rules, routines and conventions that had kept her husband's music within the boundaries of jazz even as it pushed against them.

After his death, her music began to incorporate the sound of the concert harp that he had given her. Its sweeping glissandi both emphasised the reassuring stability of modal harmonies and evoked sounds of other musical cultures, notably the drone of the Indian tambura and the rippling of the Japanese koto. Thus suggestions of Hindu and Buddhist religions were combined with the Christian traditions within which both Coltranes had grown up, and which formed a part of John's pantheistic beliefs. The music that Alice made after his departure could be seen, according to Ben Ratliff, his biographer, as the product of his most devoted disciple.

In the early '70s, Alice became attached to the teachings of Swami Satchidananda – whose followers also included Carole King – and her music gradually moved further away from the relatively straightforward jazz represented by her early solo recordings, such as *A Monastic Trio* and *Huntington Ashram Monastery*. The acquisition of a Wurlitzer organ and an Oberheim synthesiser gave her the tools with which to create

cinematic soundscapes illustrating the spiritual journey that she was on, further expanded on *Universal Consciousness*, *Lord Of Lords* and *World Galaxy* by the use of string orchestras. She was searching, she said, for music that didn't require pauses for breath: "The instruments which require breathing are more in line with what's happening on an earthly level. But the instruments that can produce sound that's continuous, to me express the eternal, the infinite."

Away from the public eye, however, her music was being constructed on a different scale, first in the Vedantic Centre she set up for her family and fellow devotees in Woodland Hills above Malibu in Southern California and then in an ashram in nearby Agoura Hills. Having taken the name Turiyasangitananda, she was performing bhajans and kirtans, songs of praise to the deity: some of them sung as solos accompanied by a keyboard, others as choral chants with percussion accompaniment, occasionally featuring other solo singers from within the community. She recorded many of these in the 1980s and '90s, making them available to fellow adherents on cassettes whose titles included *Divine Songs* and *Infinite Chants*. A selection of them received a wider airing when Luaka Bop released a compilation titled *The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda* in 2017.

Kirtan: Turiya Sings is drawn from the same source as the 1982 cassette *Turiya Sings*, but



SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Jagadishwar
- 2 Jai Ramachandra
- 3 Krishna Krishna
- 4 Rama Katha
- 5 Yamuna Tira Vihari
- 6 Charanam
- 7 Govinda Hari
- 8 Hara Siva
- 9 Pranadhana

Produced by: Ravi Coltrane
Recorded in: 1981 at the Vedantic Centre, Woodland Hills, Los Angeles, California
Personnel: Alice Coltrane (voice, Wurlitzer organ)

is a very different affair. Here the concentration is entirely on solo songs, stripped of all the decoration – the strings and synthesisers – from their original incarnations, leaving just Alice's voice and her Wurlitzer organ. Something like the opening "Jagadishwar" benefits greatly from the removal of the trimmings. It might be blasphemous to say so but the result is curiously reminiscent of hearing Nico performing the material from *The Marble Index* and *Desertshore* in concert, the clarity and directness of her voice and harmonium revealed in the absence of John Cale's arrangements.

Funnily enough, the comparison is not entirely inappropriate, even if the artistic intentions were wholly different. Alice's singing voice is also a deep contralto, strong and sure, notable for an absence of inflection, although never strident. Similarly, the organ is required to do no more than play sustained chords with a modest, rustic, harmonium-like tone. The songs are slow-paced and even in cadence, their repetitive melodies and simple harmonies generally held within such tightly defined limits that the slightest variation – as in the modest melodic wandering of "Krishna

Krishna" – comes almost as a shock.

The listener is drawn into a world of solitary devotion, very unlike the infectious choral chanting, banging and rattling on display in the Luaka Bop album (and also familiar from the chants of the followers of Krishna who once operated in London under George Harrison's patronage). Any spiritual ecstasy on offer here appears to be of a more private kind, although no doubt offering a glimpse of the divine to believers.

On other listeners, particularly those unfamiliar with Sanskrit and either ignorant or dismissive of the belief system of which these songs are an expression, its effects will be less certain. But the longer you listen, the more you're drawn in and the less aesthetically confining the music's self-imposed restraints seem. What's clear to sympathetic listeners is the direct emotional link between John Coltrane's pioneering "Spiritual" of 1961 and the sound of his wife's songs released 60 years later: very different means, same search.

HOW TO BUY...

{ ALICE'S ADVENTURES }
 How to buy three more of Coltrane's spiritual masterpieces }



Ptah, The Eldaoud

IMPULSE, 1970

Recorded at John Coltrane's old home studio on Long Island, an all-star quintet sets out on the journey from straight-ahead

modern jazz towards the exotic and the sublime, with majestic improvising from two great saxophonists, Pharoah Sanders and Joe Henderson. Heading in the opposite direction, the track "Turiya And Ramakrishna" movingly demonstrates the depth of Alice's roots in gospel and the blues.

9/10



Universal Consciousness

IMPULSE, 1971

By transcribing Alice's arrangements for strings, Ornette Coleman helped her realise this ambitious project.

With a battery of drums manned by Jack DeJohnette, Rashied Ali and Clifford Jarvis, she creates a form of abstract impressionist jazz featuring bright slashes of violin, wriggling skeins of organ improvisation and silvery cascades of harp against a background of thunderous percussion. In two words: far out.

8/10



The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda

LUAKA BOP, 2017

Bathed in Californian sunlight and the radiance

of true believers, this is a widescreen version of the songs and chants of Hinduism. Alice lets the Wurlitzer and the Oberheim rip on the intro to a remake of "Journey in Satchidananda", originally the title track of her fourth solo album, before the choir and soloists of her Ashram take over. Spectacular and stirring.

9/10



Q&A

Michelle Coltrane, Alice's daughter on spirituality, and music in the Coltrane home

The songs on the new album are very different from the music on the recordings your mother made for Impulse and Warner Bros. Can you describe the process by which she created and developed this approach?

The songs on the new album are scaled-down versions of the bhajans we hear chanted in India. The Vedic hymns there are sung by one solo lead voice and repeated by a large choir to create a cyclical call and response. Mother chose to sing and accompany herself on this recording. Mother's inflection of her own style embodied and shaped the arrangements.

Did she perform these songs in public?

Most of the devotional music was offered at her ashram.

Unlike the collective chants heard on the *Ecstatic Music* album, they seem very intimate and reflective. What did she see as their purpose?

I am going to say that an artist will most likely use the tools available to them. Mother is known as an instrumentalist. Her approach on *Kirtan: Turiya Sings* introduces us to her voice. The delivery, graceful yet powerful, humility with prayerful tonality that invites the listener to feel they are beside mother receiving *darshan* (blessings).

When did she begin singing – and was she influenced by any particular style or particular singers?

Mother grew up in Detroit playing organ at Mount Olive Baptist church

Alice and son Ravi Coltrane with a photograph of John, and the piano he gave her in 1964

as a young girl. This means that she learnt to accompany a choir and the congregation. Her influences may have started with gospel music, with intention and praise focused on the divine.

We can hear John singing on some of his later recordings, such as *A Love Supreme* and *Om*. Did he and Alice sing (or chant) together?

I remember that they laughed a lot.

Did she involve you and your three brothers – John Jr, Ravi and Oran – in music-making, individually or collectively?

All of Alice's children were encouraged to play music. I was fortunate enough to play violin on one of her sessions. However, my earliest memory is being called on stage by my mother at Carnegie Hall as a young girl, the late violinist John Blair standing next to me while I attempted to improvise. My brother John Jr before his passing [*he died in a car crash in 1982*] played bass, along with Ravi on tenor and Oran on alto on studio recordings that the late drummer Billy Higgins also played on. There were many moments like this that took place. In 1981, a concert at UCLA featured all of the brothers mentioned above, with mother and Rashied Ali on drums.

What was the approach to preparing Alice's music for release on this album?

It has been an unbelievable journey, watching our mother protect and uphold

with the utmost respect the legacy of John William Coltrane's artistic contribution while she unquestionably embodied her own musical strength and talent. I listened when mother would be interviewed about her own releases – the conversation would turn very quickly to John's work, influence and so on. She was always so kind and generous about that. I am observing mother's musical legacy. I feel that a resurgence is needed for art that evokes deeper meaning. The time is here for the healing of our hearts and minds. We found this treasure. These musical offerings are sacred assemblages of Sanskrit hymns, interpreted by an African American jazz musician.

Your mother began her career in the 1950s as a very fine bebop pianist, also studying classical music. Did she continue to practise those styles at home or did she give them up completely, particularly once she started playing the organ and other electronic keyboards?

After mother took her vows as a spiritual teacher, she mainly focused on devotional music. I heard her play a piece by Sergei Rachmaninoff once – one of the pieces from *Morceaux De Fantaisie, Op 3 No 2*. I loved hearing her play it. Now I'm equally excited to hear my nephew, 16-year-old Aaron Coltrane, playing it. Indeed, mother could have made a career as a very fine jazz pianist. A vibraphonist named Terry Gibbs worked with her when she was starting out. I spoke with him just this year to hear about their working experience. Terry gave the highest compliment to mother's musicianship. He said he was sorry to lose her when another bandleader asked her to join his band on a gig in Sweden. That bandleader's name was John Coltrane. Mother told me that she and John were seekers musically and spiritually, constantly trying to find new pathways and new directions.

After John's death in 1967, did he remain a strong presence in the household? Were the children encouraged to see his life as an example?

Absolutely. Our home was filled with the music of both parents. Mother would play records – classical ones too – and we would jump up and down on the sofa. She offered the music and the history and shared many stories. We learnt along the way as we matured about both the impact of both of our parents' careers – also their dedication to the music, spirituality, universal connectedness, love for humanity, family, and the supreme Lord. After father passed, mother asked us if we knew where daddy was. All four of us kids shouted, "He's in the studio, making a record."

INTERVIEW: RICHARD WILLIAMS

“My earliest memory is being called on stage by my mother”

MICHELLE COLTRANE



Songwriter supreme:
Laura Nyro, Royal
Festival Hall,
London, 1971

LAURA NYRO

American Dreamer

MADFISHMUSIC

10/10

New boxset invites listeners new and old to give an all-time great the attention she deserves. *By Laura Barton*

OVER the years, Laura Nyro has not been short of admirers. There was David Geffen, of course, who managed her. And Clive Davis, who signed her. Peter, Paul and Mary, Barbra Streisand, and Three Dog Night, who covered her songs. And Bette Midler, who inducted Nyro into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame by noting how “she could make a trip to the grocery store seem like a night at the opera”. But perhaps the definitive compliment came from Alice Cooper, who once described the experience of listening to Nyro’s second album, *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession*, with awe-struck simplicity: “You sit there and go, ‘That’s songwriting.’”

BARRIE WENTZELL

Nyro was indeed a consummate songwriter. Her extraordinary melding of pop and R&B and jazz and avant-garde piano compositions suggesting a wellspring of musical talent, and a degree of finesse that seemed somehow at odds with her beginnings: the self-taught daughter of a piano-tuner from the Bronx who grew up singing on street corners and subway stations.

Despite her fervent supporters, these days Nyro rarely receives the immediate deference she deserves. Instead, her name bubbles up occasionally – the subject of an anniversary tribute, or as a reference point for other celebrated songwriters (more recent fans have included Kanye

West, Jenny Lewis and Tori Amos). In part this is because of the brevity of her life – Nyro died in 1997, aged 49 – and the brevity of her career: signed at 18, by the age of 24, then five albums deep, she had married a carpenter and retreated to rural Massachusetts, far

from the grasp of the music industry.

Following her divorce, there were other records – 1976’s *Smile* and 1978’s *Nested*, for instance, both included here. Thereafter a gap, motherhood, and a musical re-emergence. But her refusal in later years to promote her music in the customary ways, her tendency to turn down lucrative syncing opportunities, to play predominantly with female musicians, to disseminate animal rights literature at her concerts, meant that in her lifetime she never returned to the mainstream glare.

Still, the music is astonishing. As one early reviewer summed it up: “Laura Nyro is a total experience who explodes on and within you in a way which borders on the mystical”. There was something opulent, perhaps even fragrant, to the way she wrote: the arrangements layered, her voice given to unexpected contortion and richness and texture, so that to listen to her can seem an assault on the senses.

The sheer heft of her talent and her influence is felt in this new boxset: seven studio albums, recorded between 1967 and 1978, all remastered for vinyl, plus a bonus LP of rare demos and live recordings. The accompanying booklet offers interviews, photographs, handwritten lyrics, liner notes by Peter Doggett, and artist



testimonials from Elton John to Suzanne Vega, via Graham Nash and Joni Mitchell.

It ranges from the fervent melodies of her debut, *More Than A New Discovery*, to the mellowed warmth of *Nested*. Between them lie some of her most-feted records: Cooper's favourite, *Eli And The Thirteenth Confession*, released in 1968, is an impassioned and vibrant work, holding some of her most-revered and most-covered songs: "Stoned Soul Picnic", "Eli's Comin'" and "Sweet Blindness" among them.

Gonna Take A Miracle, recorded with the vocal trio Labelle, and produced by Philly soul pioneers Gamble and Huff, offers insight into the music that shaped Nyro's own songwriting: an album of 1950s and '60s soul and R&B standards, including "Jimmy Mack" and "Up On The Roof".

New York Tendaberry stands out anew here: striking in its spareness and intimacy, largely pairing just piano with the remarkable smoke and soar of her voice. It's easy to get distracted by the razzle of single "Save The Country" (inspired by the assassination of Bobby Kennedy) but it's in the album's more muted numbers – the title track,

for instance, and opener "You Don't Love Me When I Cry" – that one can see the bones and contours of both her songwriting and her voice. In this she feels like a forerunner to everyone from solo Carole King to James Blake to Alison Moyet.

To listen to this 12-year span of Nyro's career is to realise how many of her songs are invitations – she is forever encouraging us to 'go down' – to picnics, to stoney end,

New York Tendaberry stands out anew here, striking in its spareness

to the grapevine, to the glory river to save the country. To join her. And there is a sadness, somehow, to think of how few responded to that call; for all the accolades and adoration, the highest album spot Nyro would see in her lifetime was No 32 on the *Billboard* 200.

Posthumous praise, awards and retrospectives might be bittersweet but they bring fresh listeners and new understanding. This boxset – beautiful, thorough, a labour of love, offers an opportunity for many more of us to hear and to reconsider Nyro's music;

to sit there, like Alice Cooper, and go, "That's songwriting."

Extras: 6/10.

A 36-page booklet.



SLEEVE NOTES

LP 1 - More Than A New Discovery
Newly remastered

LP 2 - Eli And The Thirteenth Confession
Newly remastered

LP 3 - New York Tendaberry
Newly remastered

LP 4 - Christmas And The Beads Of Sweat
Newly remastered

LP 5 - Gonna Take A Miracle (with Labelle)
Newly remastered

LP 6 - Smile

LP 7 - Nested
Newly remastered

LP 8 - Parties And Live Recordings
Newly remastered

AtoZ

This month...

- P43 MILES DAVIS
- P43 PJ HARVEY
- P44 MICHAEL SMALL
- P44 PAUL McCARTNEY
- P46 CHRIS BARBER
- P47 SCRITTIPOLITTI

MARC ALMOND

Enchanted (reissue, 1990)

CHERRY RED

6/10

Ambitious 1990 album expanded



Still riding high after a No 1 single with Gene Pitney, Almond obviously had big plans for this sixth studio album.

Alas, his desire to draw on world-music flavours and up the orchestral ante clashed with producer Bob Kraushaar's insistence on sticking close to the pop sound still dominating the charts at the time. Listening now, the songwriting is still robust on the ebullient, insistent "Death's Diary", the grandiose "Madame De La Luna" and the hypnotic "The Sea Still Sings" – they also sound better on the lo-fi accompaniment attempted on the demo versions included here. Elsewhere, though, the europop bobble cramps Almond's sweeping romantic style. A stirring exception is the Stephen Hague-produced symphonic pop journey of "A Lover Spurned", achieving a much more majestic synthetic-organic blend.

Extras: 6/10. B-sides, flabby '12" remixes, but some superior demo takes hint at what might have been. **JOHNNY SHARP**

WILL BEELEY

1970 Sessions TOMPKINS SQUARE

8/10

Another dozen never-heards that should have landed front and centre



A south Texas answer to the northside's eclectic, imperial songwriters such as Steve Young and Townes Van Zandt, Will Beeley barely

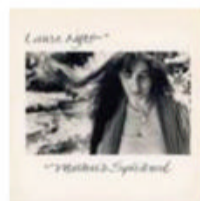
registered during his prime. But with this unreleased second album, *1970 Sessions*, he can be discovered anew. Sharp, tricky melodies, surfacing from deep down in the rural midst, meet with sparse yet expressive guitar rhythms and leads. Meanwhile, Beeley's voice and lyrics target life at all angles: "Passing Dream" is the centrepiece, examining hopes and wishes in the ether. "What Is The Color Of The Soul Of A Man", Beeley's take on racist America, deserves to be heard. And while every song here finds its niche, the bluesy "Pitch Black Sky" and the poetic "Tall Wind" – worthy of exceptional cover attempts from, let's say, Waylon Jennings – are pure marvels.

Extras: None. **LUKE TORN**

HOW TO BUY...

THE EMPRESS NYRO

Three later works that represent a more relaxed but political singer



Mother's Spiritual

COLUMBIA, 1984

Some were put out by the tonal shift of Nyro's

eighth studio album: the furious romance of the songs she wrote in her teens and twenties now overtaken by thoughts on motherhood, feminism, and environmentalism. For others, this is a visionary record: a profound rumination on female experience.

8/10



Laura: Live At The Bottom Line

CYPRESS, 1989

Those familiar with the intensity of early-career

Nyro will be struck by the laidback, light-hearted tone of this live album, recorded at the legendary New York venue in 1988. There are six new songs here, all similarly relaxed in tone. Nyro's voice is still an instrument of strength, though coloured by decades of smoking.

7/10



Walk The Dog And Light The Light

COLUMBIA, 1993

The last album of Nyro's lifetime, *Walk The Dog* is

the more polished studio sister to *Live At The Bottom Line*, drawing on the same musicians and tone. She again veers towards political themes, including animal rights and the maltreatment of Native Americans. Her voice is smokier here, less urgent, but sometimes all the more persuasive for it.

6/10



Count Ossie & The Mystic Revelation Of Rastafari

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Fire Over Babylon: Dread, Peace & Conscious Sounds At Studio One

SOUL JAZZ

8/10

Spiritually charged roots reggae from Clement Dodd's super studio. *By Jon Dale*



OVER the past few decades, Soul Jazz have made a name for themselves with stylish, smartly conceptualised comps. Their curatorial touch is sure but lightly applied, and if they sometimes skirt

predictability, there's something to be said for the reliability of their approach, particularly when taking on a catalogue as deep as the productions made at Clement Dodd's Studio One, the 'Motown of Jamaica'. A legendary place, with Dodd a gifted producer, some of reggae's greatest passed through – Bob Marley, Burning Spear, Bunny Wailer and Johnny Nash all cut sides there, often backed by house band the Skatalites; arranger Jackie Mittoo finetuned his craft at the studio, too.

Fire Over Babylon is particularly potent, though, for its focus, pulling together a selection of Studio One sides lit by the devotional spirit of Rastafarianism. A religion steeped in defiance of ongoing colonial invasion, Rastafarianism cohered as a belief system in the 1930s, with preachers calling for a return of all black people to Africa, following the appearance of their new god. Rastafarianism's history is a complex one, a sect in perpetual battle with hegemonic institutional forces (the police, the government), defiantly anti-capitalist, and imbued with a deep sense of righteousness, 'rebel spirit', and a relentless drive towards black self-determination.

Dodd never clearly articulated his faith to the public, but he ran deep with Rastafarian artistic communities. He'd take members of the Skatalites to drummer Count Ossie's 'reasoning and jam sessions' in Jamaica's Blue Mountains. Ossie was central to the development and dissemination of nyabinghi, a compelling rhythmic base to those reasoning sessions. At its most furious and

expansive, Ossie's music was properly psychedelic, as form-disruptive and mantric as free jazz: Soul Jazz head Stuart Baker describes Ossie's work with Cedric "Im" Brooks and the Mystic Revelation Of Rastafari, as a "supergroup the equivalent of Sun Ra and John Coltrane in jazz".

Ossie's contribution to *Fire Over Babylon*, recorded in collaboration with Brooks, feels like the centrepiece of the collection, the magnetic attractor around which all the other material gathers. On "Give Me Back Me Language And Me Culture", the flipside of a 1971 single that originally appeared on producer and label owner

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Freddie McGregor – I Am A Revolutionist
- 2 The Silvertones – Burning In My Soul
- 3 Wailing Souls – Without You
- 4 Devon Russell – Jah Jah Fire
- 5 Trevor Clarke – Sufferation
- 6 The Gladiators – Sonia
- 7 Judah Eskender Tafari – Always Trying
- 8 The Viceroy's – Ya Ho
- 9 Imand Count Ossie – Give Me Back Me Language And Me Culture
- 10 The Gladiators – Serious Thing
- 11 The Prospectors – Glory For I
- 12 Wailing Souls – Things And Time
- 13 Pablo Black – Inner Peace
- 14 The Gladiators – Peace
- 15 Horace Andy – Mr Jolly Man
- 16 Wailing Souls – Rock But Don't Fall
- 17 Albert Griffiths and The Gladiators – Righteous Man
- 18 The Viceroy's – So Many Problems

Junior Lincoln's Banana imprint, Ossie and Brooks tie everything together in a spectacular production: the bubbling brook of hand-pulsing rhythms draw from nyabinghi traditions; the brass arrangement calls back to mento; the bass is a slow, sly depth charge; the vocal chorus is gently insistent, an imploring chant.

Just as often, though, the heaviness of the songs' content is often belied by the fleet-footedness of the production – Devon Russell's "Jah Jah Fire", for example, is breezy, aerated, its rustling, buzzing organ the melodic sugarcoating on Russell's devotional plaint. By contrast, The Gladiators' "Sonia" is starchy and stripped back, its rhythm carved from a granite block of texture, a minimalist masterpiece of interlocking parts. There's a fierceness to the discipline here that can gift even the lightest of production touches with the heaviest gestural implications: the playing is tight, in the pocket, the better to build a solid foundation for the vocalists' to-and-fro chants and soul-spun melancholy.

That discipline, something that's always felt core to Clement Dodd's productions with Studio One, isn't stentorian, though. There's great playfulness and pleasure at the heart of *Fire Over Babylon*: from the way the trumpet skates and glides over the lithe rhythms and dubbed-out rimshots of Judah Eskender Tafari, or the hissing hi-hats and wandering bass that grounds The Prospectors' "Glory For I", there's space here for joy and celebration, too. Wailing Souls' "Rock But Don't Fall", a lovely, chimeric thing that rides in on chiming piano chords and a muted guitar riff, captures the spirit here tidily: spiritual but open, light and loving but with depth of conviction.

If there's any risk here, it's that *Fire Over Babylon* doesn't allow for the extension that can make Rastafarian roots music so intoxicating. Some of the most powerful material in this realm was recorded elsewhere, like Dadawah's *Peace And Love: Wadadasow*, and the epochal sets Ossie and Brooks essayed with Mystic Revelation Of Rastafari, titles like *Grounation*, *Tales Of Mozambique* and *One Truth*. That's maybe a little unfair to Soul Jazz's focus on the Studio One archives, and they've certainly done an excellent job with *Fire Over Babylon*. Think of it as just one of many angles you could take on this eternally nourishing music, and you won't walk wrong.

Q&A

Soul Jazz's Stuart Baker on Studio One

What was the thinking behind the selections?

It's a combination of musical, intellectual and emotional processes functioning all at once. I see Rastafarianism as a faith based on a magical presumption (that Haile Selassie, crowned king of Ethiopia in 1930, is God). From believing this idea, Rastafarians are able to emotionally and intellectually throw off the shackles of colonialism and a past history of slavery – to reinvent themselves as proud lions rather than victims.

There's an interesting

relationship between religiosity and entrepreneurialism in the Studio One ethic.

I think Rastafarianism, Clement Dodd's entrepreneurship and the high sense of righteousness in everyone involved are all a manifestation and reflection of the same thing: black pride and self-worth as the tool by which to enrich lives and art, and they are also a weapon by which to destroy and protect against oppression.

There are some fascinating figures on this compilation,

such as Count Ossie.

He is really the central figure in the Rastafarian movement. While Bob Marley bought the faith to students around the world, it was Count Ossie who created the first ever Rastafarian music out of two folkloric and religious forms of drumming (burro and kumina). It was Count Ossie and his drummers who Prince Buster brought into the

studio in 1960 to play on the Folkes Brothers' "Oh Carolina", a ground-zero for everything in reggae music that followed.

INTERVIEW: JONDALE



Count Ossie: 'central figure'

CARIBOU

The Milk Of Human Kindness (reissue, 2005) LEAF

9/10

One of three limited-edition vinyl reissues for one-man marvel



A mesmerising merger of electronic experimentation, pastoral psychedelia and unabashedly baroque pop, *The Milk*

Of Human Kindness may be the point at which Dan Snaith's idiosyncratic vision of past and future truly came into focus. That's no knock against its two predecessors, 2001's *Start Breaking My Heart* and 2003's *Up In Flames*, which were initially released under the UK-based Canadian's original monicker of Manitoba (changed owing to legal hassles with the Dictators' Handsome Dick Manitoba) and now return in black-vinyl reissues alongside his 2005 debut as Caribou. It's just that the colours in Snaith's kaleidoscopic third outing are a touch brighter. The heady likes of "A Final Warning" and "Bees" also mark a shift away from folktronica and shoegaze trappings toward new reference points such as the loopy inhabitants of the Canterbury Scene and American minimalist composers like Steve Reich and Morton Subotnick. All three albums chart paths he'd continue to explore right up to the present.

Extras: None. JASON ANDERSON

THE CURE

Wild Mood Swings (reissue, 1996) UMC

7/10

Double-album vinyl picture disc reissue for Record Store Day



When *Wild Mood Swings* was released in 1996, there was a consensus that its title was an oversell. Certainly, when

measured against its predecessors – The Cure's umpty-platinum imperial period of *Wish* and *Disintegration* – it felt like a slight work, harking back to the much frailer-sounding group that had made *The Top* just over a decade previously. Heard now, removed from the acts it was following, *Wild Mood Swings* stacks up more convincingly. "Want" is a compelling addition to The Cure's canon of dry-ice-doused existentialist epics and "Strange Attraction" an unusually straightforwardly told tale of obsession and bewilderment set to a syrupy pop backing. Robert Smith's own estimation of *Wild Mood Swings* as one of The Cure's best will remain a minority position – but it is nevertheless worth another listen.

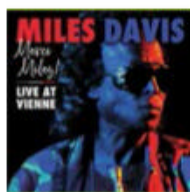
Extras: None. ANDREW MUELLER

MILES DAVIS

Merci Miles! Live At Vienne RHINO

7/10

Previously unreleased set recorded three months before his death



In the summer of 1991, Miles Davis made his final European tour with a five-piece band that included saxophonist Kenny

Garrett, Deron Johnson on keyboards and two bass players. Judging from the energy and vitality of this set of jazz-funk fusion laced with R&B and hip-hop overtones, there was nothing to indicate that his tempestuous life was nearing its close. The band whip up a storm, with Davis allowing his sidemen plenty of space to solo. Yet it's his burnished trumpet playing that remains the central attraction, whether swinging seductively on "Jailbait", blowing with melodic lyricism on "Amandla" or absolutely hammering it on "Hannibal". On his return to America, he checked in for a routine medical and three weeks later he was dead from a stroke, pneumonia and respiratory failure.

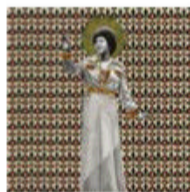
Extras: None. NIGEL WILLIAMSON

ARETHA FRANKLIN

Aretha RHINO/ATLANTIC

9/10

The Queen of Soul from 14 to 76



Timed to coincide with the biopic starring Jennifer Hudson, *Aretha* doesn't start with its subject's legendary

first album for Atlantic Records in 1966, which not only made her a star but redefined soul music. Nor does it open with her debut for Columbia Records six years earlier, when she was 18 and doing standards sets similar to her hero Dinah Washington. Instead, it opens with the 14-year-old Aretha shaking the walls of her father's church with "Never Grow Old" in 1956, and it's clear she had not only remarkable power at a young age but also remarkable control. *Aretha* shows how she assimilated gospel, jazz, R&B, pop and even opera into a distinctive sound, which makes this set dizzyingly diverse. But Aretha's mighty voice ties everything together.

Extras: 8/10. 19 previously unreleased live tracks and studio outtakes, including a home demo of "Try A Little Tenderness" and a lively duet with Tom Jones. STEPHEN DEUSNER

MARK FRY

Dreaming With Alice (reissue, 1972) NOW-AGAIN/RESERVE

9/10

Lovely psych-folk gem, 50 years on



The story of *Dreaming With Alice*, the first album released by English acid-folk drifter Mark Fry, is as idiosyncratic as its

times. A teenage Fry relocated to Italy to study painting; landing in a country in the midst of political unrest, Fry took refuge in writing gentle, mysterious songs, which landed him a contract with RCA Italia and sessions backed by pre-chart success Scottish group

Middle Of The Road. The result was a masterpiece of psychedelic whimsy. The episodic title track, Bolan-esque in spirit, wraps around raga-like songs drizzled with sitars, hypnotically spun, echo-laden folk-pop miniatures, and nostalgic reveries like "Lute And Flute".

Extras: 7/10. Lovingly packaged with extra material from highly listenable mid-'70s sessions. JONDALE

NOEL GALLAGHER'S HIGH FLYING BIRDS

Back The Way We Came: Vol 1 (2011-2021) SOURMASH

7/10

Solo career-spanning compilation highlights his drift from dad-rock



A lone Noel Gallagher took his time before deviating from the Oasis template. This collection's first disc is dominated by songs

like debut single "The Death Of You And Me" – The Kinks meet, inevitably, The Beatles – and the plodding "In The Heat Of The Moment". But 2017's David Holmes-produced *Who Built The Moon?* saw Gallagher leave his comfort zone, while 2019's dramatic "Black Star Dancing" EP suggested an appealing familiarity with Duran Duran and "This Is The Place" seemed designed to win over New Order fans. Two new tracks, "We're On Our Way Now" and "Flying On The Ground", were presumably – unfortunately – recorded during those early years.

Extras: 7/10. Deluxe edition has unreleased acoustic versions, remixes, instrumentals and an unheard demo.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

PJ HARVEY

White Chalk – Demos UMC/ISLAND

8/10

Album number seven in a comprehensive reissue series



There's surely no PJ Harvey album more naturally twinned with its demo form than 2007's *White Chalk*. It's largely

acoustic, which means there's little distance between the songs' prep versions and final recordings. Most were written on piano and what sounds like an old upright dominates, Harvey's relative lack of experience allowing her to effect the radical shifts in song shape, mood and singing voice that she was after. On the gently heaving "Silence", her multi-tracked vocals are already in place – though not Eric Drew Feldman's subtle Optigan swirls – but with its reverb and emphatic piano, "When Under Ether" sounds surprisingly warmer and more substantial in its demo take.

Extras: None. SHARON O'CONNELL

KHAN JAMAL

Infinity (reissue, 1984) JAZZROOM

8/10

Spiritual jazz classic re-emerges



Noel Gallagher: flying out of his comfort zone



For years, Khan Jamal was known to only the most dedicated of spiritual jazz connoisseurs. But the Philadelphia-

based vibraphonist has been getting some long-overdue recognition recently, thanks to reissues of his rare LPs, including 1974's remarkable, dub-adjacent *Drum Dance To The Motherland*. The similarly long-out-of-print *Infinity*, from about a decade later, isn't quite as radical as *Drum Dance*, but is wonderful all the same, with Jamal joined by some talented collaborators – drummer Sunny Murray and alto saxophonist/flautist Byard Lancaster among them. Together, they conjure up a luminous sound that regularly calls to mind *Crescent*-era Coltrane. Opener "Nubian Queen" floats by on a billowing cloud of vibes and flute, while the moody "The Known Unknown" is a showcase for Jamal's dazzling skills. Perhaps most interesting are Clifton Burton's harmonica contributions, suggesting untapped possibilities for the instrument. Throughout, *Infinity* is fresh and lively, a classic waiting to be discovered. TYLER WILCOX

PAUL & LINDA MCCARTNEY

Ram (reissue, 1971) MPL/CAPITOL/UMG

9/10

Piece of cake: Macca's second effort, half-speed mastered



The reputations of 1970's *McCartney* and '72's *Wings* debut *Wild Life* may have been, to varying degrees, rehabilitated today,

but there's been no such need with 1971's much-loved *Ram*. In many ways, it's a continuation of McCartney's contributions to the final three Beatles albums – country and folk pastiche, screaming rockers, lush piano ballads and stoned oddities – and this new half-speed master brings out the brightness (perhaps to excess) and layers in this varied, playful set. "Too Many People" is a sublime opener, full of massed percussion and wild guitar solos, and "Heart Of The Country"'s multi-tracked acoustic guitars are more vibrant than ever, while the two "Ram On"'s remain as melancholy as they are hallucinatory. Fifty years on, it has a strong claim to be the finest of all his post-Fabs work.

Extras: None. TOMPINNOCK

REDISCOVERED

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



Death atop Seattle's Space Needle in *The Parallax View*

MICHAEL SMALL

The Parallax View: Original Soundtrack

CINEMA PARADISO

8/10

Vinyl debut for acclaimed conspiracy-thriller OST



"If the picture works," director Alan J Pakula said of 1974's *The Parallax View*, "the audience will trust the person sitting next to them a little less at the end of the film." *The Parallax*

View is a key paranoia-conspiracy movie from a decade – the 1970s – that was full of them, from *The Conversation* to *Three Days Of The Condor* and Pakula's next work, *All The President's Men*. Adapted from a novel reflecting unease around the disappearance of many individuals connected to the JFK assassination, the film imagines a shady deep state organisation bumping off witnesses to a presidential murder. This release compiles every note of music from the original photoplay on vinyl for the first time.

Composer Michael Small had already soundtracked two previous Pakula movies, including the excellent *Klute*. He felt the latter had waded into too-dark waters, and his theme tune and cues – totalling just 24 minutes – speak to *Parallax*'s slow-burning, ominous disquiet. The main theme is a looming chord on deep strings with classic blips of piano and woodwind: menace and suspicion leach out of every bar. A lone violin slices diametrically athwart orchestral string-sweeps, an individual out of kilter with a larger entity. Written to accompany a tracking shot of corrupt judges dismissing a case, the cue was intended as a broody distortion of a patriotic anthem. The composer considered this appropriate in a film that was "exploring conspiracy as skewed, inverted loyalty."

The most challenging sequence – the film's notorious centrepiece – is Beatty's induction at the Parallax organisation's Division of Human Engineering

(the chillingly calm voice of his unseen interlocutor is now revealed to be Pakula himself). In order to inculcate emotions of anger and injustice, prospective assassins are forced a montage of American iconography, from historical paintings to photos of Depression-era poverty, images of idealised family life and the unattainability of the American Dream. The music Small wrote to accompany the brainwashing is a nostalgic distillation of country rock and folk-pop, rising to a chest-swelling Sousa-style march, then whipping up passions with searing Farfisa-heavy acid rock. It's a masterstroke that recognises the power of battle hymns to stoke nationalist fervour and inspire murderous vengeance.

Small's soundtrack was praised at the time of the release – Pakula stated it was one of his favourite scores – and he went on to compose for unsettling thrillers such as *The China Syndrome* and *Marathon Man*. Meanwhile, with its pessimistic portrayal of subverted democracy, homegrown terrorism, and the engineered mistrust of government, *The Parallax View* speaks more clearly than ever to a contemporary USA of 4chan nutjob recruitment, a besieged Capitol and weapons-toting members of Congress.

Extras: 7/10. Liner essays by Scott Bettencourt and Alexander Kaplan. **ROB YOUNG**



In too deep state: Warren Beatty (left)

JUANA MOLINA

SEGUNDO (reissue, 2000)

CRAMMED DISCS

9/10

Second sight: the idiosyncratic Argentine's revelatory starting point



Though she's rightfully known as a pioneer of the looping pedal, Molina's unique vision was already in place on *Segundo*,

released a year before the Boss RC-20 emerged. This epic double LP was constructed from multiple sets of sessions, most made alone in various home studios, though Springsteen producer Ron Aniello is a surprising collaborator on "El Desconfiado". The lightning strike came when Molina realised that her messy, free demos were far better than anything she recorded 'properly'; and so pieces such as the carnival-esque, electronic "Mantra Del Bicho Feo", the woozy nursery rhyme "La Visita" and the gorgeous Technicolor trip-bossa of "El Perro" and "Quiero" created a stellar blueprint which set the songwriter off on the hazy, surrealist path she's still following.

Extras: 8/10. Full remastering and a great 16-page large-format booklet telling the story of the album, including how she signed to a label she wasn't happy with purely so she could use this cover art. **TOMPINNOCK**

MOTÖRHEAD

No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith (40th Anniversary Edition)

SANCTUARY/BMG

8/10

Deluxe edition for Motörhead's tinnitus-inducing chart peak



Talk about beware the ideof March. Recorded over three nights at the end of March 1981, *No Sleep...* was the album that gave Motörhead something like

celebrity status. When the album entered the album charts in late June, it did so to do battle with Shakin' Stevens and *Stars On 45*. It wasn't a fair fight, really. The shows recorded at Leeds (28th), and Newcastle (29th, 30th) found Motörhead in peak form, their set drawn from their classic 1979–80 material, during which a very fast and heavy thing swung hard too. There's "Ace Of Spades", of course, but also "No Class", "Bomber" and "Overkill". This expanded edition adds paper bits, full shows from the three nights (with more dedications and banter than you need) and a soundcheck that reveals how *Ace Of Spades* mastermind Vic Maile captured the band's power. "Can you hear me, Vic?" asks "Fast" Eddie Clarke, during a brief lull in the tumult. "Just about," Vic replies. Even Motörhead weren't immune from the pressures of fame, sadly. Having crested with this definitive statement, hubris and inferior songs ensured the only way from here was down. But they certainly didn't go quietly.

Extras: 7/10. See above. **JOHN ROBINSON**

MUDHONEY

Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge: 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition

SUBPOP

8/10

Seattle veterans' fuzz-addled 1991 classic with added goodies

{THE SPECIALIST}



Barber: trombonist, bandleader, facilitator

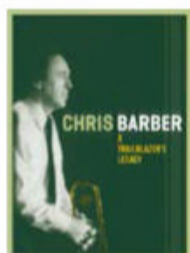
CHRIS BARBER

A Trailblazer's Legacy

LASTMUSICCOMPANY

9/10

Limited edition tribute to a groundbreaking bandleader



BY any yardstick, Chris Barber was one of the most influential figures in 20th-century British popular music. His death in March, just before his 91st birthday, inspired tributes to a man whose instincts and enthusiasms helped lay the foundations for just about everything that happened in the 1960s and beyond. This set of four CDs, meticulously compiled and copiously annotated by Alyn Shipton, handsomely illustrated and limited to 1,000 copies, presents an unanswerable and probably definitive case for his significance.

Barber played trombone, but that was the least important of his accomplishments. A natural-born bandleader, he was an encourager, a facilitator, an enabler. The 69 tracks making up *A Trailblazer's Legacy*, ranging over his entire career, demonstrate the breadth of his interests, his inclusive approach to making music, and his knack of playing a part in events that would later be seen as historic.

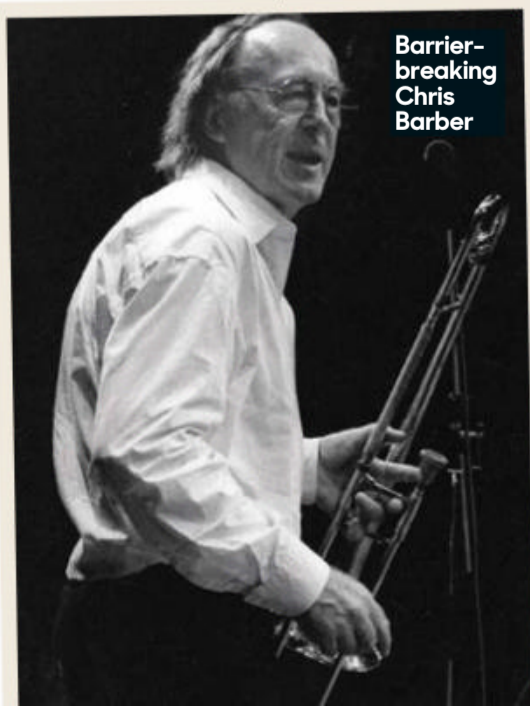
The Hertfordshire-born son of left-leaning parents – an insurance statistician and a headmistress – arrived on the British jazz scene just after the start of the New Orleans revival, forming his first amateur band in the late 1940s. While recording an album in 1954, Barber included a track reflecting his habit of presenting a short set of skiffle songs as an interlude in a club or concert appearance. “Rock Island Line” featured the singing of the band’s banjo and

guitar player, Lonnie Donegan, with Barber on bass and Beryl Bryden on washboard. Released as a single under Donegan’s name, it fired the imagination and reshaped the thinking of an entire generation.

Soon Barber would be risking the wrath of Britain’s traditional jazz purists with such heresies as expanding his band’s repertoire to include compositions by Duke Ellington, inviting the Jamaican saxophonists Bertie King and Joe Harriott to make guest appearances, persuading the Musicians’ Union to let him bring Muddy Waters, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and the duo of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee over to make their first UK appearances, and recording with a host of other American musicians, mostly with a New Orleans background, such as the veteran clarinetist Edmond Hall and the singer-pianists Eddie Bo and Dr John. All except Waters are represented here, along with other distinguished guests including Louis Jordan and Van Morrison.

What Barber understood was that jazz was never a purist’s music, and therein lay its special quality. The only purity it needed was an authentic feeling for its core components: the rhythm, the blues, and the directness of emotional expression in evidence at all the many thousands of performances in which, over the course of more than 60 years, he shared his unquenchable enthusiasm. Long before the invention of postmodernism, Barber and several generations of skilled sidemen were persuading audiences to see the music’s many strands as threads of a single cloth.

RICHARD WILLIAMS



Barrier-breaking Chris Barber



Playing The Damned to Nirvana and Pearl Jam’s Sex Pistols/The Clash, Mudhoney were the dishevelled self-mocking flagbearers of grunge, staying faithful

to Sub Pop and the underground spirit that defined the scene while their friends and rivals struck big. Released in the year of *Ten* and *Nevermind*, songs like EGBDF’s “Good Enough” and “Check-Out Time” showed Mudhoney had melodies and musical chops, but their adherence to lo-fi production ensured they would never go mainstream. You can get a sense of what might have been on this anniversary edition, which features five tracks – four previously unreleased – recorded at a 24-track studio by “Superfuzz Bigmuff”/Mudhoney producer Jack Endino. They have pep and clarity but Mudhoney wanted grit and fuzz, so retreated to an 8-track studio, using the 24-track recordings as demos and turning their back on MTV-approved stardom in the process. Further rarities – B-sides, demos and non-album singles – round out the picture. Mudhoney continue to release superb albums, but this remains the best place to start.

Extras: 9/10. Rarities and unreleased tracks, liner notes, new cover art, photos, poster, coloured limited vinyl edition. PETER WATTS

RUSSELL POTTER

A Stone's Throw/Neither Here Nor There (reissues, 1979, 1981) TOMPKINS SQUARE

7/10, 8/10

Lost albums by a guitar wunderkind



On his 1979 debut, *A Stone's Throw*, teenage guitarist Russell Potter covers “The Assassination Of Stephan Grossman” by John Fahey. His version recreates the

loping pace and lo-fi immediacy of the original, but Potter has the audacity to combine it with his own jumpy “Lemon Rag”. It’s a startling moment that shows an admirer linking arms with his hero. A freshman at Goddard College when he wrote, recorded and self-released *A Stone's Throw*, Potter was a devoted student of the American Primitive scene of the ’60s and ’70s, peppering his compositions with obvious references to Fahey, Robbie Basho and others. He’s a deft guitarist putting his own youthful spin on the music, combining the processional melodies of UK folk with the rawer dirges and dissonance of Appalachian music. That culminates on 1981’s *Neither Here Nor There*, where the acolyte graduates to idiosyncratic artist. He never released another album.

Extras: None. STEPHEN DEUSNER

SCRITTI POLITTI

Cupid & Psyche 85 (reissue, 1985) UMC

8/10

Landmark set on LP, the full realisation of its driven creators’ talent



Green Gartside established his literate pop star reputation on Scritti Politti’s second, spawning three elegant Top 20 singles along the way. The seductive synth

reggae of “The Word Girl” is arguably the most straightforward and radio-friendly of the hits, but it’s the sublime, twisted disco of “Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)” that cemented the band’s dramatic shift from



The Shins: channeling Byrds and Beach Boys

their DIY squat-punk beginnings on Rough Trade before they were wooed by Virgin's marketing muscle, while "Absolute" flirted with the melodic funk of commercially minded Prince. Despite recording sessions in London and New York stretching over two full years, it's a cohesive collection that enriched the pop grammar of the times.

Extras: 6/10. Sleeve notes. 1988's *Provision* and *Anomie & Bonhomie* (1999) also get reissued. **TERRY STAUNTON**

THE SHINS
Oh, Inverted World
(reissue, 2001) SUBPOP

8/10
Albuquerque alt. pop quartet's watershed debut, remastered

Celebrating a triumphant moment from two decades ago might not always seem like the wisest move for anyone still in the game, but James Mercer is nothing if not self-aware. The anointing of his band as premier indie players by *Garden State* may have bumped their profile but this set was marked out as a winner three years before by its smart reimagining of '60s pop, chiefly The Beach Boys and The Byrds. Bright, clean and light, its mien also recalls The Verlaines and The Clean, though there's greater complexity in its arrangements. The movie-featured "New Slang" is still a charmer but it's not the best song – that's a contest between a rousing "The Celibate Life", "Weird Divide", with its dolorous, Spanish guitar tone, and the clipped "Girl On The Wing".
Extras: 6/10. A booklet with vintage photos, handwritten lyrics, liner notes, new sleeve. **SHARON O'CONNELL**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Impulse! Records: Music, Message And The Moment

IMPULSE!
8/10
The jazz label's 60th celebrated with consciousness-raising 4LP box



Like Blue Note's '60s turn from rarefied bebop to soul-jazz, the music on this collection is often reaching back to reclaim something, whether the earthy New Orleans hustle and street-roars of Mingus's "Better Get Hit In Yo' Soul" or the throbbing, joyful funk in both of pianist Ahmad Jamal's hands. The saint of Impulse!, Coltrane, touches most tracks. His "Alabama" is a 1963 snapshot reaction to the KKK's murder of four schoolgirls at a church, his sax gravid, husky and sad. By 1966's "Reverend King", his bass clarinet is

a clamorous, mesmeric shriek. The chronological sense throughout these '60s and '70s sides is of jazz, even as it lost its popular black audience, trying to communicate more and reach further, finding growing spiritual balm in defiance of American racial violence. By 1975, a sax veteran of Coltrane's *Ascension*, Marion Brown, is playing "Bismillahi 'Rahmani 'Rahim" with lush, impressionistic beauty, this former fire-breather moving towards a new communion.

Extras: 6/10. Essays. **NICK HASTED**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Strain, Crack & Break: Volume 2 (Germany)

FINDERS KEEPERS
8/10
Nurse With Wound-approved experimentation from Germany



The second in the series compiling music, based on country of origin, that originally featured on the 1980 Nurse With Wound list composed by the industrial outfit on their epic avant-garde record-collecting voyages. Here Germany is the focus, but your typical Can, Neu!, Amon Düül fest this is not. Jazz pianist Wolfgang Dauner opens the LP with "Output", all scratchy discordance and jagged edges of wild guitar with not a groove in sight. Association PC comes across as equally impenetrable via its skittish expulsions. However, despite there being abrasive anti-rhythm offerings, there's also some smoother sailing to be found via the psych chug of Out Of Focus, the jazz-funk strut of Brainstorm and the kaleidoscopic closing wigout from Brainticket. It's a collection that still feels as truly out-there as it does buried underground.

Extras: None. **DANIEL DYLAN WRAY**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
The Trojan Story (reissue, 1971)

TROJAN
9/10
The pre-history of roots reggae, reissued and refined



The way Trojan label manager Bob "Rob" Bell puts it, *The Trojan Story* came about as a response to "the lack of respect shown to Jamaican music by most DJs, critics and writers". The triple album that resulted has long felt totemic, its exploration of then recent Jamaican music history deftly woven and explained with excellent curatorial choices. With reggae's history now often collapsed into a too-tidy narrative that moves from roots to dub to dancehall, *The Trojan Story* is smart to highlight the music's roots in mento and rumba with cuts from Lord Tanamo and Jackie Edwards, respectively; from there it maps out ska, rocksteady and reggae with an inquisitive spirit. A beautiful, deeply felt collection.

Extras: 8/10. Additional tracks and changes to the original running order. The entire set is included on LP and

CD, and there's a lovely booklet with reminiscences from Bell and track notes. **JONDALE**

WAR
The Vinyl 1971-1975 AVENUE/RHINO
9/10

50th-anniversary coloured-vinyl release of their first five LPs for Record Store Day



Eric Burdon might have helped launch them to the world, but LA's War only really got good after the British singer left. This RSD boxset packages the band's first five post-Burdon albums on coloured vinyl, and all have something to recommend them. The self-titled 1971 LP features the jittery 6/8 vibe of "War Drums", the harmonica-led "Vibeka" and the wonderfully creepy "Fidel's Fantasy" (a counter-revolutionary anthem that probably alienated a few leftist hippies). *All Day Music* moves into dreamy, slow-motion soul, including the folk-funk of the title track and the gentle jazz-funk of "Nappy Head". *The World Is A Ghetto* – America's biggest-selling album of 1973 – is a tremendously musicianly brand of laidback West Coast funk that truly took them out of the R&B ghetto; 1973's *Deliver The Word* features the stone-cold funk classics "Me And Baby Brother", "In Your Eyes" and "Southern Part Of Texas"; while 1975's *Why Can't We Be Friends?* mixes quiet-storm soul with heavy-duty salsa and the Latin-funk of "Low Rider". A tremendous and often forgotten catalogue.

Extras: 5/10. All on coloured vinyl. **JOHN LEWIS**

THE WEDDING PRESENT
Seamonsters: 30th Anniversary Edition SONY

9/10
Groundbreaking, soul-searching, lo-fi British post-rock



The Wedding Present always stood apart from UK indie, never more so than on third LP *Seamonsters*, which felt more like a



COMING NEXT MONTH...

Next time around, there'll be new records from **David Crosby, Shannon & The Clams, Nathan Salsburg, Liars, Torres, Villagers, Molly Burch** and more – including a bunch of great stuff that'll surely drop without warning into *Uncut's* inbox between now and then. In the world of archival releases, there's **Prince's** unearthed *Welcome 2 America*, an anthology of **Leslie Winer's** pioneering music, and a collection of **Caravan's** entire oeuvre, all 37 CDs of it. **TOM PINNOCK@UNCUT.CO.UK**

British outpost of US post-rock with a crawling, growling, textured angst that had much in common with the likes of Slint and Pavement. The album was recorded in suitably brutal fashion by Steve Albini, who reflected the band's sense of pummelling dislocation on what was essentially a break-up record. David Gedge's fractured self-loathing and repressed rage led to superb tracks such as "Corduroy", "Lovenest" and "Suck", and the sound of the album would kickstart a chain reaction: after hearing it, Polly Harvey decided to work with Albini for *Rid Of Me*, which in turn influenced Nirvana's decision to record *In Utero* at Pachyderm.
Extras: 6/10. Extras showcase the band's less abrasive side on a series of B-sides and Peel Sessions, including a cover of Steve Harley's "Make Me Smile (Come Up And See Me)". **PETER WATTS**

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PAUL McCARTNEY

A FAB TIME

Photographer **HARRY BENSON** was nonplussed when he received a commission to cover **THE BEATLES** in 1964. All the same, travelling from London to Paris and New York during this breakthrough year, he struck up a rapport with the band – and **PAUL McCARTNEY** in particular – that endured through several decades. With a new collection of his images due for publication, Benson shows us McCartney at work and at play – backstage, in hotel rooms and on private jets. The secret of Benson's success? "Quickness wasn't everything," he tells Mark Beaumont. "It was the *only* thing."

All photos: © HARRY BENSON

LONDON, 1964

"Beatlemania was like the fans were joining in the act, in a way. They tried to outdo one another. 'How much crazier can we behave at this station than the other station?' Or, 'The place we're at tomorrow is going to be worse than the one we just left...'" ►





▲ PARIS, JANUARY 18, 1964

"Another photographer was coming on to the tour and I wanted to leave with a good picture. I said, 'I want you to have a pillow fight.' They all said no. John said, 'It'll make us look childish and immature.' He was very adamant: 'We've got to stop looking childish.' They all agreed with him. So John went to his bedroom, leaving the other three in the room. Then he came up behind them and banged them on the head with a pillow... and then it took off!"

▼ NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 7, 1964

"They were nervous, arriving in America for the first time. They didn't know what kind of reception they were going to get. They were worried about demonstrations by the Freedom Riders, because they knew about America's civil rights problems. They came down the hotel stairs very apprehensive. I remember John looked out the window and said he didn't see any demonstrations. So... who was going to go outside first?"

ALL PHOTOS © HARRY BENSON



“I WAS sent to cover The Beatles by *The Daily Express*. I wasn't pleased! I was going to do a political job in Paris, which was going to take me on to Africa – but I got pulled aside one night and told I was doing The Beatles. I wasn't much into rock'n'roll. But after a few days I realised I was lucky, because The

Beatles were turning into a phenomenon. “Paul was polite, but smart-alecy. He knew how to handle us. He was clever, so was John – but there was an aloofness around Paul. ‘I'm better-looking and I speak better than the rest of them.’ All the same, he knew what to do to make you happy. None of the newspapers were looking for a depressing story. There might be broken hearts left behind – and there were – but you weren't looking for a fight. “They were only 21, 22, 23 years old. They didn't know what they wanted. So



you had to come up with different ideas for a shoot. Success was coming up like an express train – if you got anything from them, that could mean everything. I wanted a picture of them that nobody else was going to get. I wanted The Beatles to have a pillow fight...

“The road crew used to pick up girls and make sure the band weren’t in a room with 15-year-olds. That was very important.

I remember, one night George wanted a bottle of whisky in the hotel, so he went to the room where the road crew were – and they were all there with loads of beautiful girls. He brought the other three down to see, because the roadies had sifted out all the pretty girls! There was hell to pay...

“They started making our job more difficult – photographers and the press – by saying, ‘We don’t

want to give an interview’ or ‘We’re not going to do it there or then.’ Usually it would come through someone like John. Or Paul would say, half-heartedly, ‘We’ve got to be more in control with this or that.’ I wanted off of it after about two or three nights, but that 1964 tour was going on for another three weeks or so. I wanted to move on to another story. I wasn’t a rock’n’roll photographer, but I stayed with the band on their first US tour.” ➤

▲ PARIS, JANUARY 1964
“When John and Paul got together, they would always sit down and start to play the piano. It was like they could cut everything out around them – coffee coming in the room with cakes and buns, alcohol, anything. They would simply start composing. I’m sure that the one they were doing here was ‘I Feel Fine.’”

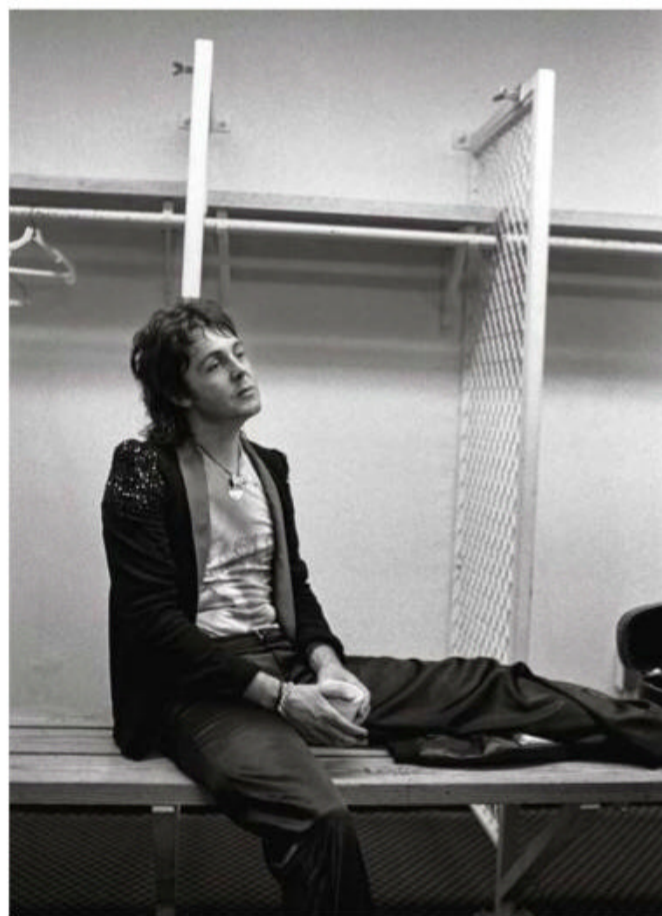


◀ **LOS ANGELES, MARCH 1975**

"Paul used to like to sit down with his family and just play little ditty tunes. 'Do-Re-Mi', little nursery rhymes. It was very touching, with his kids. He would spend at least an hour and a half with them, being a good father. He was very warm. It was charming to be able to get photographs like that. It humanises and softens the whole thing."

▲ **LOS ANGELES, MARCH, 1975**

"That was very quick. I had to be quick. The shoot never went on for hours and hours. If you do that, they'll do everything they can to avoid you doing the same thing again with them tomorrow. Quickness wasn't everything, it was the only thing."



◀ **NEW YORK, MAY 26, 1975**

"That would be on a Wings tour. Linda was friendly, madly in love with Paul - and he was with her, too. She entered a whole situation with him, that success, which wasn't... real. They'd go back to their dressing room, then they'd go to their hotel where there would be as much booze as they wanted. But I never saw any of them drunk."

▲ **1976**

"That was after a show. They would come on very excited and when the thing was over they were all like balloons after the air had been let out. Other performers were the same, like Frank Sinatra. After they've given a show, they'd done their best."





▲ **LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA, 1975**

"Dylan? He was nice enough, but it was like he couldn't finish a sentence. Then again he was talking to very quick-witted people like Paul, John and George. They were very fast on their feet in comparison to Dylan, who seemed think about everything. About a year later, I mentioned this to Truman Capote, and even Capote said, 'I've seen him, he comes over and he's the biggest phoney I've ever seen!'"

▲ **USA, MAY 26, 1976**

"It was like they didn't quite realise that this was a special occasion – to go from New York to somewhere else on a private jet. I got off after five or six trips. I couldn't take any more of it. The same picture, the same conversation and the same boredom."

▼ **LOS ANGELES, 1976**

"Paul would stand and chat with me. He was quite comfortable being photographed with me, although we never became close friends. It was a professional relationship – I never tried to become friends with any of my subjects. I wanted to photograph what I see. Wherever I am, the one thing I must do – I must tell the truth." 📷



Paul is published in July by Taschen as a collectors edition of 600 copies, numbered and signed by Harry Benson

ALL PHOTOS © HARRY BENSON



TURKISH DELIGHT

From their base in a former Cold War nuclear bunker, psych warriors **ALTIN GÜN** are busy reinventing the deep and mystical sounds of Anatolian rock. Their tools? Fuzz pedals, electronics, and ancient instruments once used in shamanic rituals. But their message, they tell Tom Pinnock, is universal: "Songs about love, hate, tragedy, death, war... it's all basic human emotions..."

Photo by RONA LANE

THERE'S a rumbling deep beneath Vondelpark – more precisely, emanating from the Vondelbunker, a Cold War nuclear shelter under a bridge in one of Amsterdam's biggest parks. These days, it's a volunteer-led space for cultural events and houses practice rooms where bands, including Altın Gün, rehearse.

"It's a proper bunker!" laughs Merve Dasdemir, the band's singer and keyboardist.

"We have a very nice space there," says bassist and founder Jasper Verhulst. "Though there are no windows and there's not a lot of air in there."

At the Vondelbunker, Altın Gün can rehearse whenever they want. But there's not been much call for that lately. There's Covid, of course. But before that, the band's busy gig schedule meant little practice was necessary. "We used to play a lot," says Dasdemir, "so we'd usually be gone."

Much of the world, it seems, has been calling out for Altın Gün since they released their debut album, 2018's *On*. Their kaleidoscopic mix of psychedelic rock, disco and Turkish traditional music has found appreciation with both younger hipsters and the Turkish diaspora across the globe. That's good going for a group whose repertoire – "Halkali Şeker", for instance, from debut *On* – is probably most often heard at weddings in Turkey.

Indeed, they've been asked to act as a wedding band many times, according to Dasdemir: "We're trying to stay out of weddings, because if you go in there you can't get out!"

Some are more wary of weddings than others. Erdinç Ecevit, co-vocalist, keyboardist and saz player, of Turkish heritage but born in the Netherlands, regularly played at Turkish weddings in the Low Countries for work, until the band took off. Along with the rest of the members, Ecevit is now happiest playing with Altın Gün, taking traditional material and processing it through their own radical, groove-based filter.

"At a wedding, people constantly want to tell you what to play," says Verhulst, "which is understandable but, if you're a band like us, it wouldn't really work."

"Sometimes it happens at shows, though!" says Dasdemir. "They write the name of a song on a napkin and give it to me onstage. I'm like, 'Dude, we're not that kind of band...'"

"People sometimes see us as a cover band but folk music is something very different to me," adds Verhulst, explaining the group's modus operandi. "Before bands like The Beatles, people would play standards, folk songs or compositions by someone else. I think it's really nice to go back to that and do something different with these traditionals." ▶

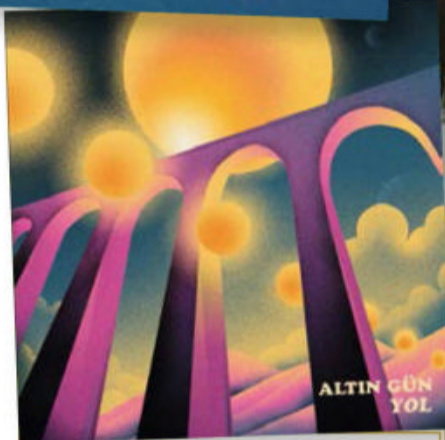
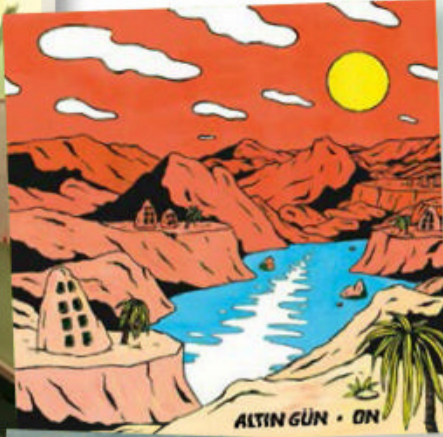




Günsblazing:
(l-r) Erdiç Ecevit,
Merve Dasdemir,
Gino Groeneveld,
Ben Rider, Daniel
Smienk and
Jasper Verhulst



Nuclear option: the band's studio in a former Cold War bunker



On tour in L.A., August 2019

The group's third album, 2021's *Yol*, certainly puts the emphasis on different, with more synths and electronics, and a crisper, harder-edged sound, thanks in part to Belgian electronic duo Asa Moto's fine production.

"When I first heard Altın Gün, I was intrigued with how these songs were being given a new spin," says Chris Eckman, manager of the band's label Glitterbeat. "The whole thing was looking both forwards and backwards at the same time. Then when I heard the first single from *Yol*, 'Ordunun Dereleri', I was blown away. It was clear they had turned another corner. The intro felt very urban, even icy, and then Erdinç's yearning vocal came in and suddenly it was something else completely. There was that timeless element that deep roots provide."

JASPER Verhulst can't remember when he first heard a saz; growing up in Transvaalbuurt, a district in the east of Amsterdam, Turkish music was all around him. "I went to school with a lot of Turkish kids," he explains. "I must have heard Turkish music in a grocery shop or something. There were Turkish sounds always."

Meanwhile, Merve Dasedemir, growing up in Istanbul, and Erdinç Ecevit, raised in the Netherlands, were exposed to Turkish traditional music in a much deeper way.

"As a kid, Turkey was always our summer holiday destination," says Ecevit. "What I liked the most was the music shops because they would sell the bağlama and a lot of other traditional instruments."

The bağlama – also known as the saz – features movable frets so that the microtonal scales of Turkish music can easily be produced. It's these notes-between-the-notes, not unlike the blue notes in jazz and blues, that helps give Anatolian music its otherworldly, expressive quality.

"The saz has a history going back to the pre-Islamic days of Turkish people when they were shamans," explains Murat Ertel, leader of Turkish psych-rockers Baba Zula. "For so many years it has been the symbolic instrument of the folks that are against the palace and the Islamic ruling class. If you raise a saz up in the air, every Turkish citizen knows what it means: 'Revolt!'"

"Those scales and melodies," says Verhulst, "especially paired with '70s psych-rock and disco sounds, synthesizers, phasers, tape delays, and fuzz pedals – when I first heard that I was blown away. It sounded fresh to me even though the music was decades old."

About five years ago, after touring with Jacco Gardner and playing in bands such as Eerie Wanda, Verhulst decided to put together a group that played psychedelic Turkish music like his '70s heroes such as Selda Bağcan and Barış Manço. Dasedemir and Ecevit heard about his quest and soon the six-piece were playing a wildly varied mix of Anatolian material; apt, considering the melting pot of Turkish history.

"Turkey is unique, historically," says Dasedemir. "I was born and raised in Istanbul but my dad is actually Circassian, so his family came from Nalchik, which is now Russia. But there was a big genocide starting from 1864 so his family moved to what was the Ottoman empire back then."

"THEY'RE IN THE PENTANGLE FAIRPORT PARADIGM"
CHRIS ECKMAN

"I love that Jasper calls Altın Gün a folk band," says Eckman. "I think that really contextualises and deepens what they do. They are very much in the Pentangle and Fairport paradigm. But so were first-generation Turkish psych bands like Moğollar – whether consciously or not. Altın Gün are doing what folk-fuelled musicians have always done: extending traditions and redefining how they are perceived and experienced."

To more western ears, then, Dasedemir's voice sounds quintessentially Turkish. But there's nothing traditional about it, she claims. "I think I'm more like a pop singer. People usually sing these folk songs like there's a knife in their throat but I have a more modern approach. But the microtonal things are in your genes."

The group season their saz and Turkish percussion with a strong helping of synth, especially the Roland Juno. "It sounds super-sweet," says Dasedemir, while Ecevit reckons "it sounds like the way I like it."

"If you were a painter, you would want access to all the colours, right?" says King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard's Stu Mackenzie, a long-time fan of Altın Gün and their microtonal explorations. "More options, a broader spectrum. The first Turkish album that had an impact on me was Erkin Koray's *Elektronik Türküler*. I was into a lot of early psychedelic music at the time and this just sounded different. When I first saw Altın Gün, they sounded like a more traditional and legit version of what we were going for on [2017's] *Flying Microtonal Banana*. I loved it."

The process of putting ingredients together varies for Altın Gün, from working out how to arrange a traditional song to jamming out a groove and adapting it to fit a traditional melody and lyrics. "On *Yol*, quite a lot of them started with the groove," says Verhulst. "Esmerim Güzelim', 'Kara Toprak', 'Maçka Yolları'... most of them."

MERVE Dasedemir laughs when she explains how Altın Gün's audience – predominantly split between younger hipsters and Turkish people of all ages – should be a case study. "Sociologically, it's really cool. Otherwise it's difficult for these groups of people to be in the same room together. At a gig in Dusseldorf, there were about 800 Turkish people, it was crazy. Older people too – grandmas! They get really excited that this music they grew up with gets played in their city, so they all want to come."





Dutch ado: live at the Amsterdam Paradiso, 2019

The band's shows in Turkey itself have been even more ecstatic, especially considering that few young Turkish groups play the old songs in the way that Altın Gün do. Manager Ronald Keizer recalls a pair of gigs at Istanbul's Babylon venue: "Three generations filled the room. I made recordings with my phone and you could hardly hear the band playing the crowd sang along that loud!"

"Heavy metal and rock fans really like our stuff as well, funnily enough," says Dasedemir.

"They would prefer the first two albums though," replies Verhulst – and he has a point. *Yol* finds the band venturing further and further into electronic, icy territory, at times more reminiscent of early '80s electro than '70s psych-rock. They were heading that way already but lockdown accelerated that transition when the band were forced to record remotely from each other.

"When we made *Gece*," says Verhulst, "we rented this house for seven or eight days and went there every day. But with *Yol*, the approach wasn't as easy for everyone in the band. But I had a lot of fun looking at my laptop screen, just trying stuff out and doing stuff that I normally wouldn't. The same goes for Merve. It felt very refreshing."

"*Yol* is a logical next step from *Gece*," says Keizer. "It ended with the song 'Süpürgesi Yoncadan' and a more electronic approach. So the sound of the new album feels fresh."

Belgian duo Asa Moto – made up of Gilles Noë and Oliver Geerts – took over production duties this time around, suggesting changes to arrangements and, on the band's instruction, making Daniel Smienk's drums at times sound like drum machines.

"We definitely had never mixed a saz before," laughs Geerts, "so in that regard, we did have to adjust ourselves a bit. I believe we made our contribution by producing the songs differently than the band had imagined. We didn't know Altın Gün's music when they reached out to us but we were quite familiar with the music of Barış Manço, Selda and so on, so we immediately clicked."

"THESE SONGS STILL COME ALIVE"

Baba Zula's Murat Ertel on the power of Turkish psych-rock

"WHEN I was a child, I heard those [psych] songs on the radio and asked my parents to buy the 45s. I was used to listening to the songs of the Ashiks – the Turkish troubadours – and folk songs from my region. But these were different. The combination of modern western instrumentation with the familiarity of our music was natural and fresh.



You could hear the traces of a deep mystic culture, going back tens of thousands of years, with futuristic synths in sync. When Turkish people were forced into converting to Islam in central Asia hundreds of years ago, one of the few things the imperialist Islamist Arabs could not do was erase the music. They burned our instruments and killed our shamans, which were mostly women, but they couldn't stop the music culture. This is our link to our real selves going back tens of thousands of years. These songs are in the subconscious of Turkish people, at weddings and funerals – these songs still come alive."

Baba Zula's *Hayvan Gibi* is out on *Night Dreamer* now

The group also continued to bring in other elements that might not be found in the Anatolian psych records they revere – melodica reminiscent of Augustus Pablo, for instance, on the lascivious "Yüce Dağ Başında".

"Sometimes things start almost as a joke," says Verhulst. "That melodica, I didn't even record it with a serious intention to use it. You can hear people walking by in the background. I took a microphone and thought, 'This would be nice but if we wanna use it I'll do it properly again later'. It ended up there like that."

INFLUENCED by their Anatolian forebears they might be, but there's one substantial difference between Altın Gün's approach and that of, say, the activist Fikret Kızılok, or those in the '60s and '70s who saw reworking traditional songs with electrified instruments and acid textures as inherently political.

"The songs are not necessarily political," says Dasedemir. "It was more the artists' stance and their own material that they released, some of which you would call protest music. But Altın Gün has definitely nothing to do with that type of song. It's traditionals really – songs about love, hate, tragedies, death, war... it's all basic human emotions."

Others in Turkey, such as Baba Zula's Murat Ertel, disagree over the need for political engagement. "If you live in Turkey under the dictatorship and you have troubles, you have to express yourself," he says. "The oppressors are strong and censorship is huge but we still have a voice. Making traditional Turkish psych-dance covers about love and sex is easy but following the paths of real shamans and the Ashiks is not. Our country was and is the natural source for all this magical cultural heritage and we embrace it, naturally, as a whole, not just some safe part of it."

"We can talk for years about [the problems in] Turkey," says Dasedemir, "but we're not making this music to make a political stand. It's just very positive – all this shit is happening there, and then there's this one little positive thing where the culture gets spread in a positive way, so I don't think we would want to ruin that. Politics divides, art unites." ➤



Amazing chemistry: Altın Gün in 2020

Altın Gün's defiantly optimistic music – the group's name translates as 'Golden Day' – has certainly united singer Dasedemir's family back home in Istanbul, introducing these folk songs to her young nephews and nieces, as well as thrilling her older relatives who grew up with them. "Oh, they love it!" she adds. "They're very proud that we get to make everybody dance with Turkish traditionals."

The places where Dasedemir and Ecevit's families are from has influenced the band's choice of traditional songs to rework too. "We play a lot of songs from Neşet Ertaş, for instance," says Ecevit. "He is a very important traditional folk artist and from the same region in Turkey where my family is originally from."

"'Ordunun Dereleri' is a love tragedy," says Dasedemir. "It's a Black Sea area traditional about lovers that just can't seem to get together. 'Maçka Yolları' means 'Maçka roads', that's a district in Istanbul – it goes 'Maçka roads are made out of stone and here walks my blonde lover'; it's a fun playful song.

'Yüce Dağ Başında' is another Istanbul-area traditional, it's about an extramarital love affair and it says don't come at night, come in the morning when no-one's around."

As for the title of *Yol*, it means 'Road', because, according to Dasedemir, the group "had to follow a different road making this album".

So far, Altın Gün have stuck to traditional material. But there are often calls for them to try out original songs, especially following the improvised "Şoför Bey", which appeared on 2019's *Gece*. The group have a one-off special release planned for July, though, and are remaining a little coy about the contents.

"These things just happen," said Verhulst.

"It's a matter of feeling. If we feel it's something for Altın Gün, then we'll do it. Maybe there will be more originals in the future, we'll see."

WHEN *Uncut* speaks to Altın Gün, they've just completed a run of small test gigs in the Netherlands, socially distanced and organised to see if fans would flock back to venues. "It really felt like we were on the road again," says Dasedemir. "At the [Amsterdam] Paradiso, a lot of people got really emotional, they had tears in their eyes because it had been such a long time since such interaction, it was beautiful."

"They were events with limited audience but maximum good vibes," adds manager Ronald Keizer. "It almost felt real."

Hopefully, it'll become a reality when the band's schedule gears up again. They're heading to the UK for End Of The Road and Wide Awake in September, and returning to tour in early 2022.

"They play with amazing chemistry, onstage and in the studio," says Asa Moto's Gilles Noë. "They've created a unique mix of traditional Turkish music and modern psychedelia which is loved around the globe. The language might speak to the imagination but their sound and groove is universally enjoyable."

Catching them soon might be a good idea: as they admit, they're not an act who'll be around forever. "It feels like we're taking different roads all the time," says Verhulst. "But after another two or three albums, it might become harder. Right now we're looking forward to getting back to the more analogue way, being on the road and making music and rehearsing."

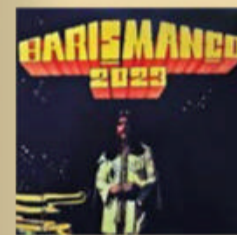
"We'll see," adds Dasedemir. "But I don't think we're gonna make five more albums. It's nice to do a project then move onto the next. After a while, you keep doing the same thing and maybe artistically you want to take different roads. It should be flexible – music is art, you can do anything." ☺

Yol is out now on Glitterbeat. Altın Gün play the End Of The Road festival in September. Visit endoftheroadfestival.com for details



SAZ YOU LIKE IT

Altın Gün's guide to their favourite Turkish psych-rock albums



BARIŞ MANÇO 2023

YAVUZ PLAK, 1975
MERVE DASDEMİR: It's his most weird, experimental record... to me it's his coolest

album. It didn't do well when it came out because it was slightly political.

JASPER VERHULST: It has this science-fiction vibe, almost. There are a lot of synths, some longer tracks also. It's like his concept album.



SELDA SELDA TÜRKÜOLA, 1976

DASDEMİR: I grew up listening to a lot of Selda and Barış Manço. This is her best record, easy.

VERHULST: The Finders Keepers release is a compilation but it has a lot of tracks from this album and it has the same cover. There's a new reissue of it on Pharaway Sounds and that's the album as it was originally released.



FIKRET KIZILOK ZAMAN ZAMAN

YONCA, 1983
DASDEMİR: He's from the same area as Barış Manço. They even went to the same high school

and they played together in a band at some points but then they fell apart because Fikret stole Barış's Belgian girlfriend. I like Fikret a lot because I really like his melodic skills and he sings really mellow as well. It's just really peaceful.

VERHULST: This is a later album but it has a really nice vibe, still very warm and friendly.



ZAFER DILEK OYUN HAVALARI

YONCA, 1976
VERHULST: He's a guitarist and arranger, he did soundtracks, library television music,

but also he's an orchestra leader. He produced that first Selda album. This album sounds like a Turkish KPM album – nice recordings, really proper library style. It's a really cool album. It's all traditionals.

DASDEMİR: It's all the dance tunes.



ERSEN DÜNDEN BUGÜNE

ŞAHINLER, 1977
VERHULST: He is also one of the classic Anatolian folk-rock guys. I think this album

is also mainly traditionals. He has a very unique style of rearranging the songs if you hear other versions of them: he just takes the lyrics and makes up new versions of those songs. It has a different style than, say, Barış Manço...

DASDEMİR: It's a bit more jazzy.

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IN BLOOM

Thirty years after *Nevermind* transformed **NIRVANA** from adolescent punks to global superstars, *Uncut* revisits this era-defining classic in the company of its surviving creators. In brand new interviews, **DAVE GROHL** and **KRIST NOVOSELIC** trace the album's remarkable journey from a rented barn in Tacoma to the stage of Seattle's Paramount Theatre and beyond, while producer **BUTCH VIG** reveals the secrets of the band's working practices. There are cameos from Neil Young's producer, aspiring cast members of *Annie – The Musical* and an ill-fated blue Datsun B210. And what of Kurt Cobain, you might ask? "He was vastly underrated as a comedian."

Here we are now, read on...

Photoby AJ BARRATT

PLUS
INSIDE
NIRVANA'S
1991 UK
TOUR!

WHO could have anticipated that when Nirvana entered Sound City Studios in May 1991 they were about to make history? Certainly, it seems, not the band themselves – according to drummer Dave Grohl, “We thought, ‘Hopefully we’ll get to achieve the success of a band like Sonic Youth, and each get to have our own apartment!’ That was the extent of our ambitions.”

It transpired, of course, that *Nevermind*’s success transformed not only the lives of the band and their affiliates – but the lives of many millions more, who found a deep connection with the band’s music and, especially, the lyrics of Kurt Cobain.

It’s a far cry from the band’s beginnings, in the American northwest. For this story, we join the band during a period of transition. Following the release of their debut album, *Bleach*, on Sub Pop, the group have begun sessions for a follow-up with producer Butch Vig. But in between a first batch of sessions at Vig’s studio in Madison, Wisconsin, the band’s drummer Chad Channing leaves. Mudhoney’s Dan Peters briefly joins for a standalone single, “Sliver”, before Cobain and bassist Krist Novoselic first encounter Dave Grohl, playing with hardcore outfit Scream in San Francisco...

“THERE NO MONEY AND THERE WAS NO TIME”

DAVE GROHL on freezing cold rehearsal spaces, road trips with Kurt Cobain and “Wilson Philips, Mariah Carey and fucking Bon Jovi”



UNCUT: Can you still remember the very first time you, Kurt and Krist played together?

DAVE GROHL: Absolutely. It was in a rehearsal space in a warehouse district south of Seattle. I knew the album

Bleach, but before I flew up to audition for the band I had memorised it. When we sat down to play for the first time in this little damp, dank, disgusting rehearsal space, that I think belonged to either Mudhoney or Tad, we locked in perfectly immediately. Plus, they hadn’t had anyone to sing back-up vocals before, so Kurt encouraged me to sing the back-up harmonies that he had put on the album but had never sang live. Within one minute we knew that this was the right thing to do. It doesn’t happen often, there are only a few times in life when things lock in perfectly. It happened with Them Crooked Vultures as well. When things just settle in so comfortably, you immediately know that it is meant to be.

Can you pinpoint the beginning of the process that eventually led to *Nevermind*?

When I joined the band in September 1990 I had only heard *Bleach*. I loved that record so much. It really stood apart from all the other music I was listening to, mostly because of Kurt’s sense of melody. There was lots of noise, lots of heavy riffs and lots of punk rock going around, but there was something about Nirvana that set them apart. The song “About A Girl” on *Bleach* just kind of blew everybody’s minds, that the band had that much of a range of dynamics, not just musically but melodically. When I joined I hadn’t heard any of the music they had recorded with Butch Vig months before [in Madison, Wisconsin, in April 1990]. Originally those recordings were meant to be the next Sub Pop record, but that fell apart. When they played me those demos – they considered them demos – “Breed” was then titled “Imodium”. I loved that riff, I loved the chorus, the simplicity of melody. “Lithium” was there and

“In Bloom”. “In Bloom” was the song that they had invested the most faith into. They had made a video for it and the production was amazing. I heard those songs and thought, ‘Wow, these guys have really taken a giant leap, from *Bleach* to this new material.’

How did things progress from there? We rehearsed those songs together and I stayed true to the drum parts that Chad [Channing] had played on the recordings they had done with Butch. Then we started writing more. Our process of writing was pretty simple. We had this little rehearsal place in a barn that had been converted into a makeshift rehearsal studio. It was about

“IT WAS SO FUCKING POWERFUL AND TIGHT”
DAVE GROHL

the size of a garage, but it did have a stage and stage lights, which we thought was hilarious, considering the whole place was covered in clam shack carpets. We would set up our instruments and turn on the space heater – it was always freezing fucking cold – and we would begin with noise. We would just have these freeform jams and those would eventually turn into songs. Kurt had riffs but they weren’t fully formed. Songs like “Come As You Are”, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” and “Drain You” started to take shape. So having those early songs that were recorded with Chad before I joined the band, then having these new songs, we knew that the record was going to be good. It was just a matter of being rehearsed and coming down to Los Angeles to record with Butch. It



was an exciting time. To me, it just didn’t sound like anything else. There were elements of bands that we grew up loving, but this was far beyond those – and we knew it.

What preparations did you make before you left Seattle to record at Sound City in LA?

Kurt and I decided to make the drive down to Los Angeles together. From Seattle to LA is, I don’t know, fucking 1,000 miles or something. It’s a long drive! I don’t know the story, but this old woman had gifted Kurt a Datsun B210, a tiny, blue Datsun from the ’70s. This thing was a piece of shit. I remember pulling up to the rehearsal place once and a wheel fell off! It was fucked. So we started making the drive and it was overheating. We’d drive for an hour and a half and have to pull over. Then another hour and a half, and another... Considering it’s a 16-hour drive, we eventually just retreated back to Seattle, pulled into a quarry and stoned the car. We broke the windows out, we were pissed. Then we grabbed the van with Krist and drove down in that.

What do you remember about the album sessions?

Nobody thought that Nirvana was going to be a huge band. So not only was there no money, but there was no time. I think we had booked 12 or 13 days. It was fast. Knowing that we had so little time in the studio, we rehearsed every day to make sure that we could get this shit in one take – which most of the songs are. At the same time, when we pulled up to Sound City, as much of a shithole as it was, it was the most legitimate recording studio I had ever been in at the time. Knowing the history of that place, we thought, ‘Now, this is the real deal.’ That being said, nobody thought that it was going to be what it became. We thought, ‘Hopefully we’ll get to achieve the success of a band like Sonic Youth, and each get to have our own apartment!’ That was the extent of our ambitions.

When did you start to realise that you might have underestimated the potential impact





Starting to happen:
Nirvana in
Rotterdam on Sonic
Youth's Goo tour,
August 31, 1991

FROM WISCONSIN TO THE WORLD A NEVERMIND TIMELINE

APRIL 2-6, 1990 Nirvana begin recording the follow up to *Bleach* at Smart Studios in Madison, Wisconsin, with producer Butch Vig and drummer Chad Channing

MAY 17, 1990 Channing's last show with Nirvana, at Zoo, Boise, Indiana

SEPT 25, 1990 Former Scream drummer Dave Grohl joins the band

EARLY 1991 Nirvana quit Sub Pop and sign to the David Geffen Company

MARCH 1991 The band begin writing and demo sessions at their rehearsal space in Tacoma, Washington

MAY - JUNE 1991 They record *Nevermind* at Sound City, Los Angeles

SEPT 10, 1991 "Smells Like Teen Spirit" is released in America. Picked up by MTV, it eventually peaks at No 6 on January 11, 1992

SEPT 24, 1991 *Nevermind* is released in the US, peaking at No 1 in January 1992. In the UK, the album stays in the top 100 for 90 consecutive weeks

OCT, 1991 *Nevermind* certified gold

NOV 30, 1991 "Smells Like Teen Spirit" is released in the UK and peaks at No 6 the following week

of the album? There were friends who heard it and said, "Oh my God. You guys are going to be fucking huge!" We would go, "What? What are you talking about?" Donita [Sparks] from L7 came by and said we were going to be fucking huge. My old friend Barrett Jones, who I had grown up with in Virginia, who was a musician and a producer himself, heard "Lithium" and said we were going to be fucking huge. He thought "Lithium" should be the first single. Everyone had these lofty opinions and I thought, 'Well, it's nice of you to say so, but there is no fucking way that is ever going to happen.' You also have to remember what was popular at the time. It was Wilson Phillips, it was Mariah Carey and fucking Bon Jovi. It was not bands like us. So it seemed totally implausible that we would ever even get close to that kind of success. But, you know, it all sounded great: the drum sound at Sound City, Butch Vig's production. The band was tight and Kurt's songs were fucking great. We would do one or two takes and maybe do an overdub here and there, Kurt would go in and do the vocal and it was crystal clear and so fucking powerful and tight. It was the album I think we'd all always wanted to make. You want to make a record that is so powerful, melodic and beautiful that you're proud of – and we were definitely proud of it.

Was there a moment around the release of *Nevermind* when you realised you had gone through the looking glass and wouldn't be coming back? Well, I still haven't figured the whole fucking thing out. What I do know is that once we signed to the David Geffen Company and

made a video, it started feeling a bit more professional. Now we were doing in-stores and signing posters. We had a rock video that was on MTV. It started feeling a bit more legitimate, but it wasn't until the tour started that I realised, 'Oh, something is going on.' We would pull up to a club that held maybe 100 people and there would be 100 more people outside. Then we got to next club that held 250 people, and there would be another 250 people outside.

You could tell that it was a happening, but it wasn't until the end of the North American tour for *Nevermind* that I realised, 'Holy shit, this thing is snowballing.' It was fucking crazy. We started the tour in a van playing places that held 95 people, and a month and a half later we played our last show in America on Halloween, at the Paramount Theatre in Seattle, which held about 3,000 people. That night we were notified that we had a gold record. Then we jumped on a plane to Europe. We had, I think, one day off between our American tour and the European tour. Europe was a little bit behind America, so it was back to normal, back to the places that felt comfortable. But by the time we left Europe it had started happening there. At the same time, we weren't really paying attention to much other than getting in the van on time and getting on stage every night. Our view of all of this happening was from the lip of the stage. Everything else, we had no fucking clue.

Would you change anything about *Nevermind*? No. [Incredulously] No! No! I remember when we were recording the album, we would track a song and at the end of the day come

home and have a cassette of the rough mix of what we had just done. I remember listening to it and being so critical of myself, and thinking, 'Oh God, I'm not good enough. Shit, I'm falling behind there, I'm speeding up there. That snare drum hit is late.' I wanted it to be great, I wanted everyone to say that this album is a killer. I was very critical of it while we were doing it, but over time it becomes what it is.

Is there much left in the vaults from that time? You know, I don't think so. I saw Krist about a week ago, and he said, "Man, there are so many songs we played that we never used!" I had no idea. As far as the *Nevermind* sessions, fuck, we didn't have any time to record extra songs. It's been 30 years, but I don't think there was much left over. We used what we had.

How will you mark the 30th anniversary, both publicly and privately? Krist and I are still very close, dear friends. Whenever there is an anniversary we text or call. He sends me pictures of his planes, I send him pictures of my children. We might plan on getting together or jamming, but we haven't got anything specific. I'm sure something will come up. Personally? Well, I don't build an altar to *Nevermind*! If I'm sitting in traffic in LA listening to the radio, fucking chances are one of those songs is going to come on – and I don't turn it off. I used to, but I don't any more. I drive around with my kids and if one of those songs comes on, they start singing all the words to it. It's not because I've brainwashed them. It's just become part of their universe. **GRAEMETHOMSON** ➤

“WE CAME FROM THE COUNTERCULTURE”

KRIST NOVOSELIC on the impact and the aftershock of *Nevermind* – and Nirvana’s unexpected admiration for the Bay City Rollers



UNCUT: What do you remember about the first time you, Kurt and Dave played together?

KRIST NOVOSELIC: It flowed, it sounded good, it was immediate. It just fell into place, there was no

awkwardness. Dave is such a good musician, he rose to the occasion – or we rose to him, whichever way it happened. It just seemed natural and Dave was easy to hang out with. I think he moved in with Kurt. That took a lot of courage, to move into an apartment with him! Dave knew the *Bleach* material, but we were already writing songs for *Nevermind*. We had some songs: some we would just make up on the spot, others Kurt had some ideas for. We were really serious about rehearsing. We had this barn in Tacoma that we rented. Somebody had tried to make it into a studio and hadn’t got very far, but it was a decent place to rehearse. We went in there and we were serious about working on the songs.

Did you have any doubts about leaving Sub Pop and signing to a major label? I was never conflicted about it. We all made the decision; Kurt and Dave and me all wanted to do it. I remember when we signed those contracts in the lawyer’s office, we were like, “Yeah, let’s get promoted and let’s do it.” It was like there was the music, which was one thing, and then there was this whole other part of it that was a completely new situation, with things not being in Olympia or Tacoma any more. It was this whole big world and us trying to adjust to that.

What do you remember about the preparation for *Nevermind*? [Geffen A&R] Gary Gersh came up from the label and we were shopping producers. I remember [Neil Young producer] David Briggs came up, but we decided to go with Butch. We just felt more comfortable, he was what we were used to. In the meantime, we just kept working on the songs, keeping them tight. By the time we went to LA, we had a couple of days of pre-production with Butch and he helped with some arrangements. It wasn’t big changes. It was, “This song is too long,” or “Maybe you should have a bridge here.” Stuff like that.

Did any of the songs change significantly? I remember when we did “In Bloom” in Madison with Chad and Butch. It was on two-inch tape, and there was a whole section that we edited out of it. Butch got his razor blade and just took it out. There was a whole other part of the song and I don’t think we ever remembered what it was! I still see it in my mind’s eye, several feet of tape in

a garbage can next to the tape machine. Yeah! Butch was old school, hands on.

What do you recall about the writing and recording of “Smells Like Teen Spirit”? “Teen Spirit” came together quickly. Kurt had this idea; he was doing his thing and Dave and I were beating that into the ground.

Then it was, ‘Hey, why don’t we take it down during the slow part?’ Kurt jumped on to that, and we thought, ‘Right, we have a decent verse now.’ It was always a fun song to play. We played it at this club at the OK Hotel in Seattle and everybody went crazy over it, they were stage-diving like maniacs.

When we recorded down at Sound City in LA, people would come and visit us. Joe Preston, the bass player in the Melvins; Kirk Channing, the cello player; L7. Whoever came into the studio, Butch would always say to them, “Hey, you’ve got to hear this song. It really rocks.” It wasn’t even mixed yet – he would put the master tape up with the rough mix and blast the big speakers in the studio. People were, like, “Wow, that song really rocks.” It was such a powerful performance, we just seemed to really nail it. “Smells Like Teen Spirit” has made me who I am to this day. I’m living comfortably thanks to that song.



Where were you living during the period you were recording the album? We were staying at this place called the Oakwood, which is a furnished apartment complex which caters to people in the entertainment industry who are coming into town. We had this three-bedroom apartment that we thoroughly trashed! Destroyed. There would always be wannabe actors and actresses there. One day there were people who were auditioning for *Annie*, the musical, all these moms and their daughters. We were like, “Get us out of here!” It was like a day-care centre or something. It wasn’t really wild. We always had a good work ethic. There was not a lot of hanging out going on there. It was work, work, work.

Was *Nevermind* an easy record to make? We’d learned from the Melvins just to be prepared. We rehearsed a lot, so when we went into the studio we were very focused. We were mindful that it was expensive and there was a schedule, so we had better be productive. Even though we had never considered ourselves professionals, we sure acted like it! We were

serious about this music and then we had Butch at the helm. He was professional and kept the train on time. There were never any big fights, it was very smooth. The songs were pretty much done. We just knocked them out.

Do you remember the moment when the album started taking off commercially? We were on a major label, so we had access to all the push distribution at that time, like MTV and radio. I remember being on tour in 1991 and the label guy would come and say, “Hey, you guys just got added to...” – whatever the local station was. Before that, with *Bleach*, we got played on college radio and maybe a Sunday-night speciality programme on a major station. This was a different deal. We were on tour in Europe, and we would hear from people that we were on

“THERE WERE NEVER ANY BIG FIGHTS, IT WAS VERY SMOOTH”

KRIST NOVOSELIC

"Everything was so fast all of a sudden": Nirvana in Frankfurt, November 12, 1991



We would just play for hours. I was like, "Why didn't we have a tape machine?" Dave was like, "Argh, I know!" Some of those jams [became] things like "Oh, The Guilt" and a few things on *Incesticide* and those other releases between *Nevermind* and *In Utero*. We did tons of material like that, but we never recorded [most of] it.

Can you put your finger on the qualities that makes *Nevermind* so special?

One of the reasons that record is so popular is that it's got a lot of variety, in terms of song styles and different sentiments. We don't just beat you over the head with the same idea. We weren't doctrinaire punk rockers with some strict ideology. We were into the punk rock community and the counterculture sensibility, but we never threw away our Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath records. We loved the music we grew up with and you could hear it. Plus, we had a sense of humour. We were into the Bay City Rollers! They had some good songs and a cheeky take on that whole boy-band thing.

I don't speak for Kurt, but everything he did was open for

heavy rotation on MTV. It was like, "Woah!" We weren't really even into MTV or FM radio. We came from the counterculture. This was like a different mainstream world.

How did it feel to be at the centre of that experience as it snowballed? Everything was just crazy! We had this huge hit record. I bought a house! It was this whole different world – everything was so fast all of a sudden. Everything happened between late 1991 up to when Kurt died in April 1994. It just seems like, 'Was that really less than two-and-a-half years?' So much was going on, it was so compressed. And then it all just spectacularly blew up. It was terrible.

Were you able to enjoy it? I had so many high points. Playing big shows, connecting with a lot of people. It was always fun playing with Dave and Kurt. There was always that thing, you know: "Kurt Cobain is the brooding, intense one...", but he was a very funny, sweet person. He had a great sense of humour. He was laughing all the time. We would always be laughing, over the silliest things. The sillier the better! There was all this pressure going on, but we'd get in the studio to play and it was like a pressure-release valve. We played together well, always. That was the glue that kept us together.

Is there anything left in the vaults from the *Nevermind* period? That's all been gone through. There are live shows from that time that we're working on, but there is really no new undiscovered material. I was with Dave just last week and we were talking about us just being spontaneous back then.

"WE WANTED TO CALL IT SHEEP!"

Dave Grohl on *Nevermind's* original title...

WE were staying at this corporate apartment complex called the Oakwood, which a lot of musicians call the 'Cokewood'. One night after coming home from the studio, we turned on the TV and Kurt and I watched this graphic documentary on underwater birth. It was sort of beautiful and funny to see these newborns squirming through water. Kurt had some sort of obsession with birth and reproduction and anatomy, and I think there was something about that image that he really connected with. I guess it was maybe the innocence of it all. Originally we wanted to name the album 'Sheep', and were talking about the cover being an overhead shot of a field full of Winnebagos and trailers. Then we saw that documentary and brought it up to the head of Geffen's art department, who then found a photo that we didn't end up using – but was similar. It was either Kurt or Krist that joked: "Oh yeah, you should put a dollar bill on a hook in front of it..." **ROBHUGHES**

interpretation. Nothing is really timely on those lyrics, nothing is dated. They are cryptic. People connected with that, along with the melody and the intensity, especially of Kurt's vocals. They still do. There are new generations who write to me and tell me that the music speaks to them. They say they had a hard time and the music got them through it. I say, "Thank you, but it's yours. Whatever your experience is with *Nevermind*, it is yours – so hold onto it." Different people have different experiences, which makes it universal. That is really the magic of it.

Is there anything you would change about the record? They are all great songs, it's a great mix, it's got a lot of power in it, a lot of edge. The guitars are screaming, the drums are bashing, the vocals are sublime – they can be intense or they can be soft. *Nevermind* is pop, it's punk, it's got a lot of good moments and a ton of dynamics. "Drain You" has a little Who tribute in the middle, there's a psychedelic thing going on. "On A Plain" is a pop song. "Come As You Are" is nice and kind of mellow. "Polly" and "Something In The Way" are haunting. "Lithium" and "In Bloom" have the big choruses. It's kind of a trip, a journey. I'm really proud of that record.

Are you planning to mark the 30th anniversary? We're going to have the 30-year *Nevermind*, but we're still putting it together. It's kind of late! What's on it? You'll see, I don't want to spoil the surprise! The anniversary is really for the fans and what the album means to them. If it helps people make some sense of the world, that's great. You have to figure it out for yourself, though. **GRAEMETHOMSON**

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS

“AS BIG AS THE BEATLES!”

From the Smart Studio in Wisconsin – via \$2 pitchers of beer at the Friendly Tavern – to Los Angeles’ legendary Sound City, BUTCH VIG guides us through the *Nevermind* recording sessions. Stand by for food fights with L7, encounters with Billy Corgan and Europe and sojourns at the “Cokewood Apartments”



JONATHAN Poneman at Sub Pop called me out of the blue sometime early in 1990. They wanted me to work with Nirvana. He said they would be as big as The Beatles. I thought he was just being cheeky. A couple of days later, *Bleach* turned up at Smart, my studio in Madison, Wisconsin. I thought it was pretty one-dimensional except that one song, “About A Girl”, which to me did sound like a Lennon-McCartney composition, an amazing melody with a great arrangement.

We scheduled a week to record and about six weeks later Nirvana showed up in the Sub Pop van, pretty

bedraggled. Krist was really friendly, Chad [Channing], who was drumming, seemed nice, Kurt was very likeable, quiet but polite. I fed them up at this blue-collar bar called the Friendly Tavern, a real working man’s watering hole and dirt cheap – you could get a

pitcher of beer for \$2 and a bowl of soup and grilled cheese for a buck and a quarter.

In the studio, I was taking my time to set up and I could tell Kurt was getting impatient. He kept saying he just wanted to sound “like Black Sabbath”. We tracked the first song and did a couple of takes when Kurt put his guitar down and went and sat in the corner. I tried to talk to him but Krist explained he got into these moods. You had to let him go through it



TimeLord: Grohl in New York, 1992

“I COULD SEE RAGE”

A problem with tempo

“DAVE was a powerhouse. The only song he needed a click track for was ‘Lithium’. Kurt would start to play at a certain speed, but as soon as Dave came in, the tempo would start to pick up. We did two or three takes and it felt like it was getting worse. At the end of the fourth take, Kurt launched into what became ‘Endless Nameless’. I could see the rage on his face, it was frightening. But Dave launched into the drums and I kept the tape rolling. At the end Kurt completely gutted his vocals, smashed his left-handed guitar and left the studio.

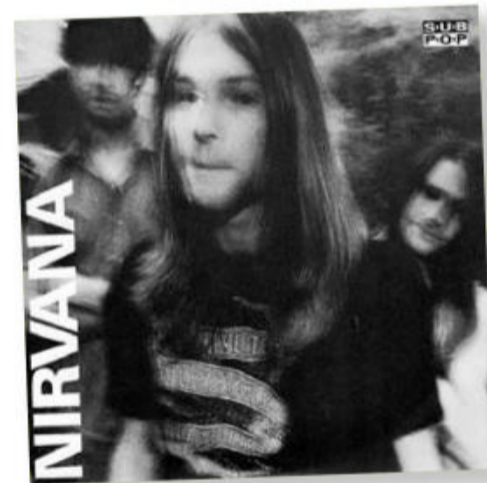
“I asked Dave if he had ever worked with a click track. David told me later that broke his heart – he thought it meant he wasn’t good enough. But the next day he played it perfectly, first take. That’s show good he was. Kurt never mentioned what had happened. He wasn’t always that great at expressing himself when he was frustrated, usually he just shut down, but in that case he exploded.”

and he’d eventually snap out of it. Eventually, Kurt stood up and said “Let’s go” and we cut the first song.

I realised that was something I’d have to deal with. He had these incredible mood swings, sometimes several times a day. I also noticed tension between Kurt and Chad. Kurt would sometimes go behind the drums and show Chad how to play. Krist was peacekeeper, the guy I would go to if I needed some help with the other two. By the time we finished, we only had something like six songs and a cover. We agreed to schedule more time, I did rough mixes, sent the band a cassette and didn’t hear anything for months.

I N early 1991, I was producing *Gish* with the Smashing Pumpkins when Krist called. They’d signed to Geffen and wanted me to engineer the record. They rattled off some names of possible producers: Ed Stasium who did the Ramones and Smithereens, Scott Litt and Don Dixon who did REM, and David Briggs who had worked with Neil Young. Billy [Corgan] kept asking if I had heard anything. I realised later that Billy was acutely aware there was a buzz around Nirvana.

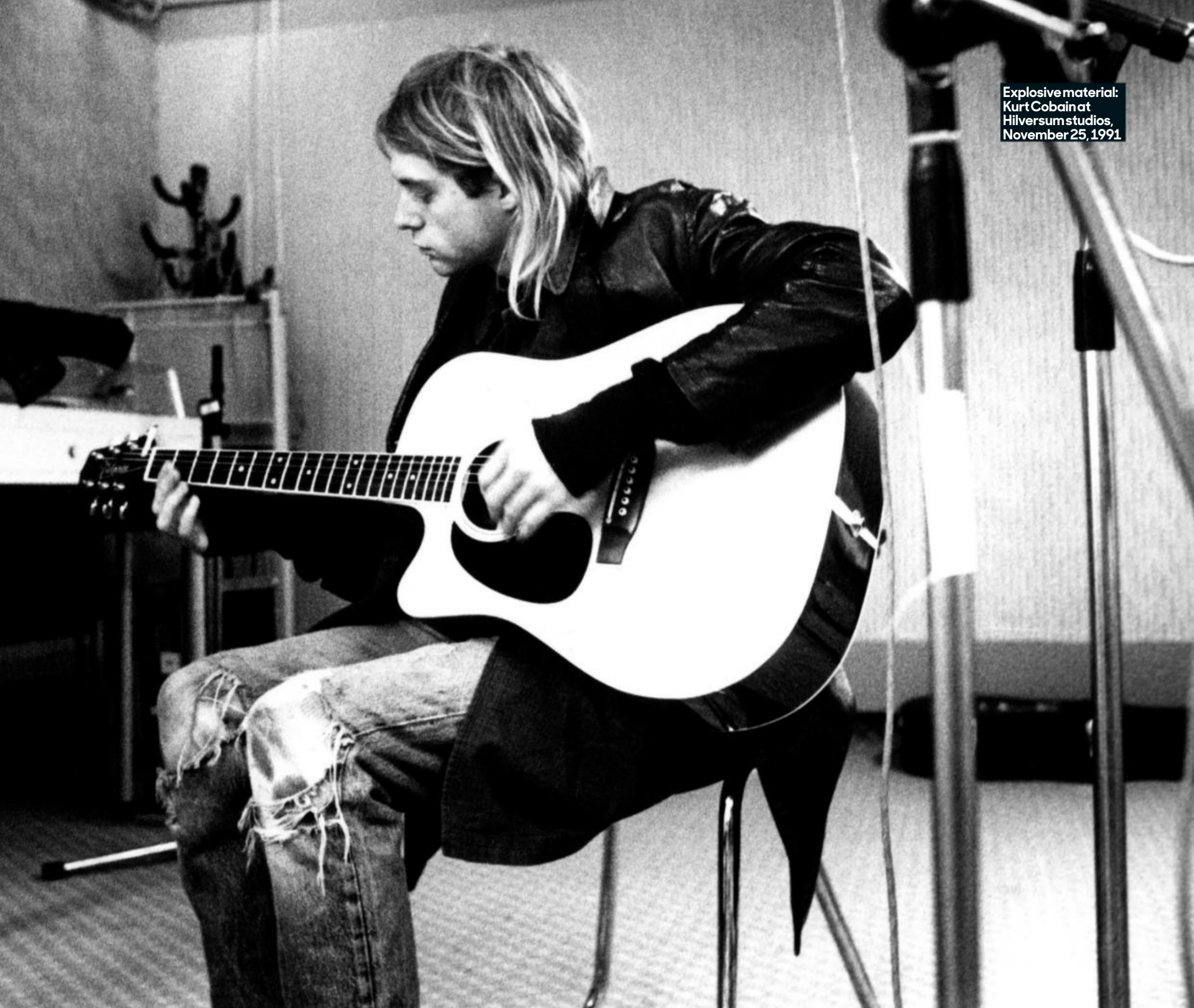
I heard nothing more for a couple of weeks then Krist called again. They decided they didn’t want to sound like REM or the Smithereens and Dave Briggs was a burnt-out hippie, so they wanted me to do the record in 10 days’ time in LA at Sound City. Four days later a rehearsal tape turned up. It began with Kurt introducing Dave Grohl and then they kicked into “Teen Spirit”. It was a boombox recording and I heard this scratchy guitar and Dave’s drum fills and then sheer distortion. The



With Chad Channing (centre), Seattle, 1989



Explosive material:
Kurt Cobain at
Hilversum studios,
November 25, 1991



recording was horrible, but I could tell the songs were tight and hooky.

Before the first rehearsal in North Hollywood I went to check out Sound City. It was in this nondescript strip mall in the valley but there were all these platinum records on the wall – Tom Petty, Fleetwood Mac, Michael Jackson. This studio had a pedigree and I realised we were lucky to be working there. It didn't have a lot of good gear, but they did have this Neve console that was one of a kind.

The band came to the rehearsal studio around 1pm. I met Dave, who was super skinny, kind of goofy, with restless energy. He wouldn't let me put mics on his drums. They kicked into "Teen Spirit". I was dumbfounded, blown away by how tight they sounded and how hard Dave hit the drums. They ran through the songs in around an hour and a half. We tweaked a little bit and I arranged to get some extra equipment, but I knew we were in good hands.

The band were staying at Oakwood Apartments in Studio City. We called it Cokewood Apartments. There were a lot of young actors and actresses staying there, a lot of wannabes. One time I went to pick them up and the band Europe

were staying across the hallway. They had this long curly blond hair and all these beautiful women around them. Little did any of us know that Nirvana would soon be putting the nail in the coffin of hair metal.

"THEY KICKED INTO 'TEEN SPIRIT'. I WAS BLOWN AWAY"

BUTCH VIG

I CAN'T remember the first song we played at Sound City but I know we cut "In Bloom" right away because I knew it from Wisconsin. I would get in between 11 and 12, listen to tapes and sometimes do a rough mix. The band would get in around 1.30. We'd run the song down and I would always hit record straight away because I never could tell how many takes I could get out of Kurt.

We would usually start recording at 2pm and end around 5 or 6. Kurt was the leader, but he trusted Krist and Dave's input. If I suggested something, they trusted me because we had worked together at Smart and Kurt liked my pedigree of working with bands like Killdozer and Tad.

We talked about how we wanted the guitar tones to be different from song to song. Kurt wanted to fill out the songs with harmonies, which Dave was great at. I told them I wanted to cut them live to get the energy but I wanted it to sound really focused with the guitar, bass and vocals very clear sounding. I said it was possible to sound heavy and energetic but still focused. That's a word I use a lot and I meant it both sonically and in terms of the performance. I wanted to embellish the sound and make it more widescreen, double track guitars and have scene changes to exaggerate that quiet-loud dynamic. Kurt was resistant to double tracking until I told him John Lennon did it. I would get him to overdub guitars and pan them left and right. Once we had done that on a couple of songs he could hear it sounded cool. He was very good at doubling to make it tight.

I never saw Kurt doing any hard drugs during *Nevermind*. He did have stomach issues and



"Kurt wanted to be successful": Roppongi Prince Hotel, Tokyo, February 1992



would sometime drink this cough syrup with coffee to get a little buzz. He didn't really like alcohol and when he drank whisky it made him ill. The only bad behaviour was when L7 came down and they had a

food fight. There was BBQ sauce all over the walls. I should have made the band clean it up.

NEVERMIND was very clean sounding but the energy was different to what was around at the time. *Nevermind* always sounds as if the band were on the verge of losing it. The songs walked a fine line between intense punk rock performances and clear, hooky production. "...Teen Spirit" in particular had an anthemic quality to the arrangement and Kurt's singing tapped into some psyche that people could relate to. When the band did a surprise show at Jabberjaw on Pico Boulevard they played "...Teen Spirit" and the crowd went mental. This was the first time I really got an inkling that this band was connecting with people in a way I'd not seen before.

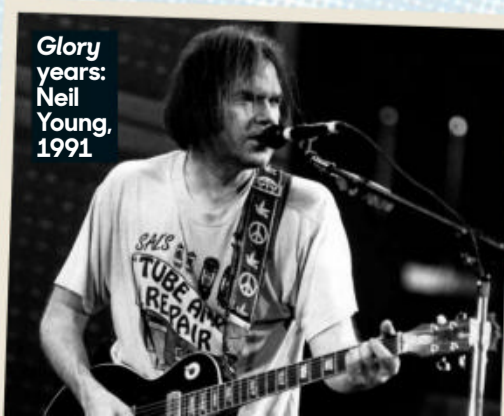
I booked seven days at a studio called the Devonshire to mix. Right away, I knew this was going to be a problem. Kurt kept micromanaging. He wanted to turn down the treble and was shying away from the poppy side of the album. I told him I didn't want to bury his vocals because the singing was one of the most intense things on the album. We agreed to work with a really good mixing engineer and the label sent over a list of 15 big names, people I would've loved to work with. Kurt was like "No, no, no, no..." until he got right to the bottom and there was Andy

"IT WAS SO LOUD"

When Vigot Weld-ed

"ONE night at Sound City, I was doing some rough mixes and saw this band in the hallway from Arizona who came through Madison a bunch of times. They were called the Sidewinders. They were recording with Dave Briggs, who Nirvana had turned down. David was friendly and invited me to come and listen to him mix Neil Young. He was tracking the Sidewinders by day and then mixing Neil Young's *Weld* after that.

"I went in around 11pm. David was taking these big swigs of whisky and then putting the bottle right back on the console. The guitar was so loud through these big speakers, I was having to surreptitiously put my fingers in my ears. It was crushingly loud. I am a big Neil Young fan and felt I had to make it through at least one song, but at the end I said I had to get out of there. My ears were ringing from these sheet-metal guitars pounding out the speakers."



Glory years: Neil Young, 1991

Wallace. Kurt said he wanted the guy who would make them sound like Slayer. I said, "Well he also does Madonna..." Andy was great. We mixed at a studio called *Scream* on Ventura. Anytime Kurt complained the vocals were too loud, Andy and I would suggest this was like The Beatles or something else he dug. The last track was "Endless Nameless". I let the band mix that.

I flew back to Madison and had a July 4 party at the apartment block I lived in with Duke [Erikson] from Garbage. The Pumpkins were in town, Killdozer were there, a bunch of other musicians. Somebody said I should play Nirvana. Everybody stopped talking and listened. I was getting the sense of this affecting people completely differently to anything else I had been involved in. When it was done nobody said anything. Then Billy Corgan said, "Play it again."

THE band kind of dissed the record after it came out. I understand why. Kurt wanted that punk authenticity and you can't do that after selling 10 million records. But at the time I know they loved the way it sounded and Kurt wanted to be successful, to make that kind of an album. Later, Dave and Krist acknowledged they loved the way *Nevermind* sounded at the time and they still feel the same way now.

In 1994, I flew to London with Duke and Steve [Marker] to meet with Shirley [Manson] to talk about forming Garbage. We spent the day drinking and getting to know each other. At about 5pm I was due to meet some engineers, hanging out with geeks to tech talk. When I walked into the place they all looked at me. Somebody said, "Did you hear what happened? Kurt Cobain is dead." That was the changing point in my life. Nirvana ended and Garbage started on the same day. It was strange, but's that what happened.

The difference between *Bleach* and *Nevermind* was that Kurt grew as a songwriter. He embraced melody. As much as he loved Lennon, I equate his singing to Paul McCartney, one of the greatest melodists ever. Kurt was starting to open up in terms of where he could take a melody and chord progression. He touched a generation who felt disillusioned and bewildered and uncomfortable in their own skins. That tapped into something you can't define but the audience understood immediately. "Something In The Way" is one of my favourite songs, partly as it was a bit more autobiographical – Kurt could be that hermit under the bridge. Part of him wanted to be left alone. The success of *Nevermind* made that impossible. **PETER WATTS** ➤

Garbage's album No Gods No Masters is available now on Stunvolume/Infectious Music



Nevermind turns 20: Krist, Dave and Butch, LA, 2011

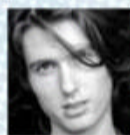
“ON THE EDGE OF CHAOS”

In late 1991, the *Nevermind* tour reached Britain – taking in numerous historic gigs as well as a brace of controversial television performances. Here, eyewitnesses recall first-hand the thrilling power of Nirvana unleashed and in their prime. “They were forging something new,” says one insider

KEY PLAYERS



EUGENE KELLY
(Captain America)



ANDY SHERRIFF
(Chapterhouse)



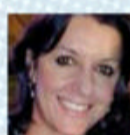
PAUL THOMSON
(Midway Still)



CRAIG MONTGOMERY
(sound)



RUSSELL LEWIS WARBY
(UK booking agent)



ALEX WESTON
(Riverman, English promoter)



DAVE McLEAN
(Riverman, English promoter)



JOWE HEAD
(TV Personalities)



TERRY CHRISTIAN
(presenter, *The Word*)



NAOKO YAMANO
(Shonen Knife)



MARK ARCHER
(Altern-8)



EWAN McNAUGHT
(Renegade, Scottish promoter)



PETER ORTON
(director, *Tonight With Jonathan Ross*)

READING FESTIVAL

“It was freaky seeing somebody doing something so dangerous...”

EUGENE KELLY (Captain America): We were playing New Cross Venue with Mudhoney and Hole – and Nirvana were there. They were about to play the Reading Festival and somebody said we should go. Krist asked if I wanted to sing “Molly’s Lips” [by Kelly’s previous band, *The Vaselines*]. I wasn’t wearing my glasses when we went on stage at Reading, all I could see was this white light and a massive punk blob which was the audience. I was flying for the rest of the day.

ANDY SHERRIFF (Chapterhouse): Nirvana broke just before the Reading Festival, so were in a lower slot than they should have been. We were the only British band on the bill. We weren’t nervous about following Nirvana, we were thinking about the other bands like Iggy Pop, Sonic Youth and Dinosaur Jr. Kurt dislocated his shoulder jumping into Dave Grohl’s drum kit and they had to cut their set short. We had to go on early and none of our instruments were ready. The pedals had been plugged the wrong way round in the rush.

KELLY: It was freaky seeing somebody doing something so dangerous. It was auto-destruction taken to the limits. Captain America were then offered the 1991 *Nevermind* tour that November, through our manager Paul Cardow and Russell Lewis Warby, who was Nirvana’s UK booking agent. The first show was in Bristol, but our van broke down on the way.

BRISTOL-LONDON

“We could have sold every show three or four times over...”

PAUL THOMSON (Midway Still): I got a call from the record



label. Captain America had broken down on the M5 and did we want to take their place? *Nevermind* had been building steadily and this was the first gig of the tour in the UK. The Bristol Bierkeller was rammed. We made a hell of a lot of noise and then had the joy of standing on the side of stage to watch Nirvana. They were pretty fired up and everybody knew it was building into something massive. We had to walk through their dressing room to leave and they were shattered. They looked like they’d been in a boxing match.



CRAIG MONTGOMERY (sound): I was part of the inner circle that travelled with the band. Susanne [Sanic] was doing light design on loan from Sonic Youth. Nic Close from Sonic Youth was guitar tech. Krist’s wife Shelli was in charge of merchandise. We also had a tour manager from Inverness called Alex McLeod and a monitor engineer from Edinburgh called Ian Beveridge. We were all travelling together in a minibus.

The PA and light rig travelled separately.

RUSSELL LEWIS WARBY (UK booking agent): There were a lot of Scots around. The Ceteran, a band from Edinburgh, were friends who I managed for a little while. Alex [McLeod]’s brother Murdo was in The Ceteran and Ian Beveridge did The Ceteran’s sound. Cameron [Fraser] of The Ceteran worked for a Scottish record distributor and sent me the first Nirvana record I heard, the seven-inch of “Love Buzz”.

ALEX WESTON (RIVERMAN, UK promoter): This was about the third tour we’d done with Nirvana through Russell. They did three shows, then went to Europe and came back for nine more. The demand on the band was getting bigger and they were having to do a lot of TV and press

DAVE McLEAN (RIVERMAN, UK promoter): Kurt would turn up around 1pm. There would be a big queue of people and he’d talk to them and put them on the guest list. He’d say, “Dave, tonight we have a guestlist of 120 people.” Everybody from the music industry



Lipssync: Eugene Kelly with Kurt at Reading

Auto-destructive:
Cobain pre-shoulder
dislocation at the
1991 Reading Festival



of their performance. It was very loud and wild, big chords and a huge sound, but there were quiet parts when you heard the amazing harmonies Kurt was doing with Dave Grohl.

WESTON: Astoria was the moment when you thought it was something out of the ordinary. There was sense of anticipation and then release when the band came on stage.

THE WORD

"Get a fucking move on!"

TERRY CHRISTIAN (presenter, *The Word*): They would have been booked by Jo Whiley. Even in rehearsal they were amazing. It was a live show and we were overrunning 'cos we had Baddiel and Newman on and they wouldn't shut up. Nirvana came on and Kurt said that thing about Courtney Love being "a great fuck". Nobody gave a fuck about that but what I really remember is thinking, 'Get a fucking move on, mate, you're eating into your own time here!' I think on the original broadcast we only got about 1 min 40 sec before we had to fade it out.

KELLY: On *The Word*, Kurt wore a Captain America T-shirt that I'd given him. We watched that as they went off to Europe. We also watched them at the end of the tour on *Jonathan Ross* playing "Territorial Pissings" instead of "Lithium" – just attacking that song, showing they wouldn't just stand there and do as they were told.

MONTGOMERY: Our driver was a great guy. As long as we were in the UK he was OK, but in Europe we spent a lot of time circling round city centres looking for gigs. We played Germany, Holland, Belgium and Italy. The atmosphere was the same whatever sized venue we played, it was packed.

BRADFORD-BIRMINGHAM

"You could tell something special was happening..."

KELLY: We picked up the UK tour again in Bradford. The exciting thing was seeing Nirvana every night. I was in awe, I'd never seen anything like them. When we left the venue there was a mob of people waiting. You could tell something special was happening and it was happening very quickly.

MONTGOMERY: Nirvana were in demand, booking agents were fighting for the right to book them so way to curry favour is to let them pick the support. We were huge fans of Shonen Knife and we had a friendship with Eugene because Kurt was a huge fan of The Vaselines.

wanted to be on the guestlist. We could have sold every show three or four times over.

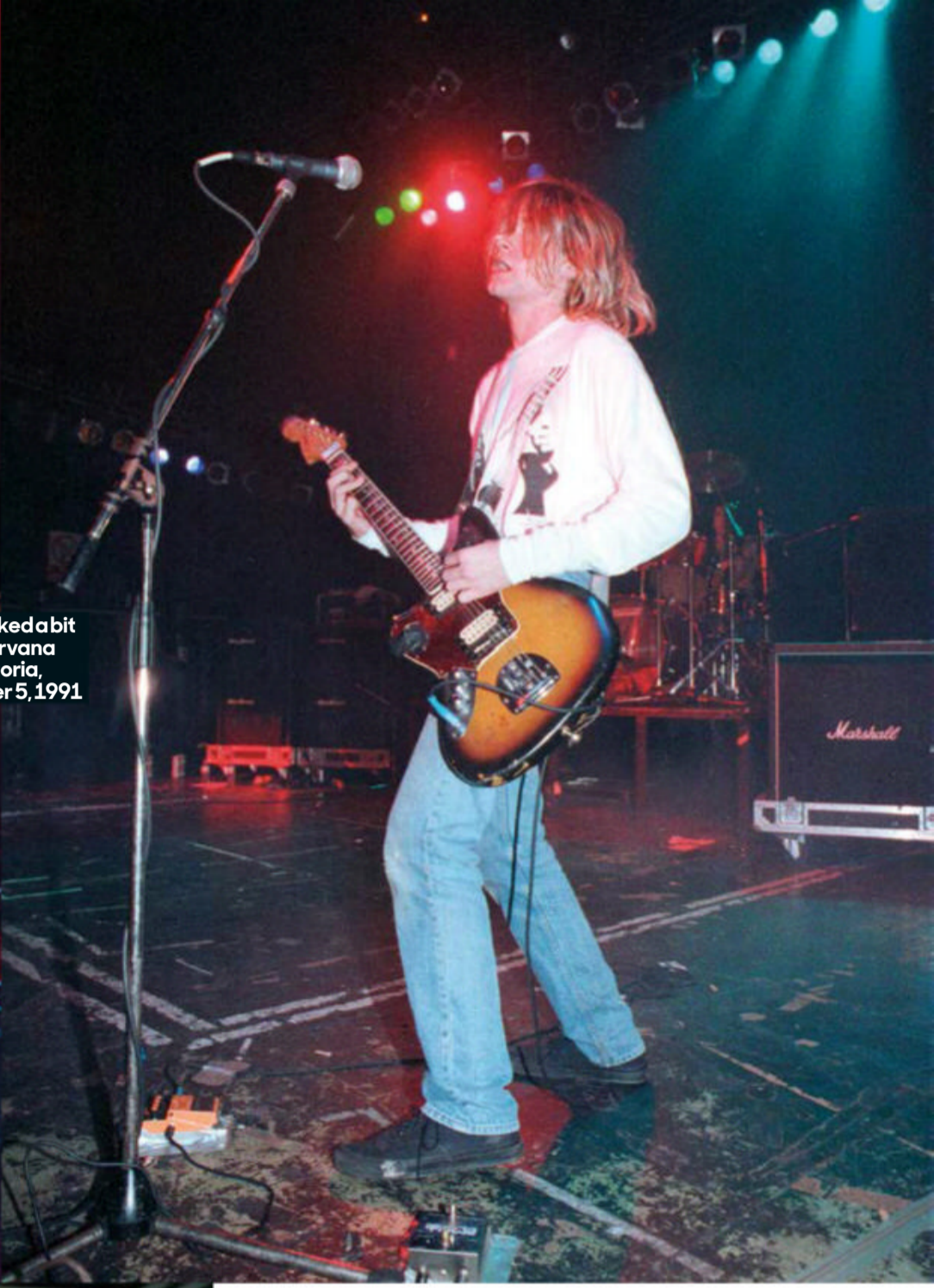
MONTGOMERY: I wanted to make it musical, which means the vocal is in front, intelligible and melodic. For the audience to connect with the singer you need to understand what they're saying. That's what set Nirvana apart. They had songs and a singer. Anybody can hit their drums and turn the guitar up to 11, but not everybody has a singer.

KELLY: We joined the tour at London Astoria. People were so excited for Nirvana. They opened with "Jesus Doesn't Want Me For A Sunbeam" and that kind of blew my mind. I went to see them backstage and all I could say was "'Jesus Doesn't Want Me For A Sunbeam'!"

JOWE HEAD (TV Personalities): We got the call to play the Astoria at quite short notice. It turns out Kurt was a fan. We were thrilled because they were just starting to break. I was very pleasantly surprised by the light and shade

"IT WAS LOUD AND WILD, BIG CHORDS AND HUGE SOUND"

JOWE HEAD



"They looked a bit wild...": Nirvana at the Astoria, November 5, 1991



NAOKO YAMANO (Shonen Knife): I didn't know Nirvana when we got the offer to do their support. Our manager showed me their album jacket. They looked a bit wild on their photographs and I was worried. We shared a van and tour crew with Captain America, but we stayed at the same hotels as Nirvana.

McLEAN: Before Kurt died, we were planning a show at Milton Keynes Bowl. I met Russell at the Lamb & Flag [Covent Garden pub] and he said this is the bill. It was Nirvana, Björk, Björn Again and Huggy Bear. That was Kurt's dream bill.

YAMANO: Kurt was always at the side of the stage watching our show. It was our first long tour. I had sore fingers from playing guitar every night. We went to Windsor Castle with the Nirvana crew on a day off. All members of Nirvana took care of us.

TOP OF THE POPS

"We were crying with laughter..."

McLEAN: They filmed *Top Of The Pops* before the Birmingham Hummingbird show and we all watched it together the next day in the canteen at Sheffield Octagon.

MONTGOMERY: *Top Of The Pops* is a perfect example of Kurt's sense of humour. He performed "...Teen Spirit" as an amalgamation of British goth-style singers with some Morrissey thrown in. He was vastly underrated as a comedian. He was all about taking the piss out of rock'n'roll. We were all watching it – band, crew, support acts – crying with laughter.

MARK ARCHER (Altern-8): We were on the stage directly opposite them. It was weird, you don't normally see people play up *TOTP*, they usually want to put on their best show, but he was properly taking the piss. You could see the producers getting annoyed and they couldn't stop it. We chatted

Out of time: *The Word*



"A CAR WINDOW WOUND DOWN AND A GUN CAME OUT"
DAVE McLEAN

afterwards and Kurt said he didn't want to waste his voice when they had fans who had paid to see them perform that night.

MONTGOMERY: Kurt's singing style couldn't be sustained for months on end. If he hadn't had all the other issues that would have been a big problem.

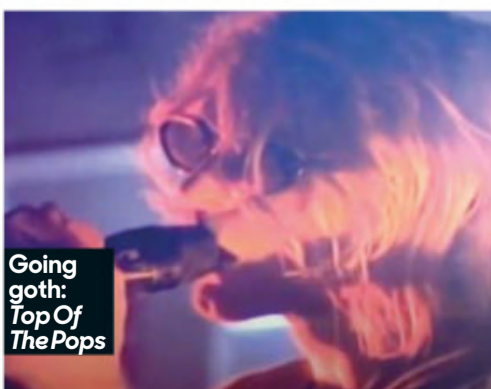
EDINBURGH—LONDON

"They were on the cusp of being huge..."

EWAN McNAUGHT (Renegade, Scottish promoter): We booked them for two shows, one at Calton Studios in Edinburgh and another at QMU in Glasgow. We had the Joyriders at Edinburgh with Murdo, who had been in *The Cateran*. His brother was Alex, the Nirvana tour manager. Before the Edinburgh gig Kurt was really ill with stomach problems. It was touch and go whether that show would even happen.

WESTON: It would flare up and he'd have to lie down, but the main thing was he always wanted to do the gig.

McNAUGHT: After playing Glasgow on Saturday, Kurt and Dave came back to Edinburgh on Sunday and played this tiny pub, the Southern Bar, with the Joyriders. They played unannounced in front of about 40 people. They were on the cusp of becoming huge but they were happy to do a favour for a local support act.



Going goth: *Top Of The Pops*

McLEAN: All through the tour, the merchandise touts were rucking with the Nirvana guys. The bootleggers kept saying, "Wait until you get to Manchester." We got to Manchester and as the venue emptied I went outside and a car drove past, a window wound down and a gun came out. I went to the dressing room, tried to act cool, but told Alex [McLeod] we had a problem. He switched from the tour bus to another van. I think Alex also changed all the hotel rooms that night. It was quite dodgy.

KELLY: I found a diary from the Nirvana tour and it's mostly filled with the drama going on in Captain America at that time. But I did find an entry saying that the end-of-tour party was in a small bar down the road from the Kilburn National and that we all went on Nirvana's bus to a club called Syndrome [21 Oxford Street] afterwards.

YAMANO: Nirvana gave special tour T-shirts to everybody. We also got bunch of flowers from Nirvana. The atmosphere was very happy, warm and peaceful.

THOMSON: We were invited to the Kilburn aftershow party and were standing at the back not knowing who to talk to when we saw Dave Grohl. He had to battle through the crowd to get to us. He came up and said, "You guys rock!" That was a nice moment for us. We were all the same sort of people, we liked the same music, doing the same job but they happened to become a massive band.



Slam punk: making a last-minute song change on Jonathan Ross's chat show; (below) pages from Eugene Kelly's diary

TONIGHT WITH JONATHAN ROSS

"They were teetering on the edge of chaos..."

PETER ORTON (director, *Tonight With Jonathan Ross*): They sent us the music

["Lithium"] and as a director I had to break it down with the script supervisor and plan the shots. They rehearsed in the afternoon and it was looking good. When the show went live, after about four bars I realised they were playing a different song ["Territorial Pissings"]. I told the crew to busk it, have fun and we'll call it as it goes along. I watched it recently on YouTube and I think we did a good job. It was shot at the Greenwood Theatre in Guy's Hospital near London Bridge and we all went to the pub afterwards. Dave Grohl said, "Sorry about changing the track like that, Pete." I told him we didn't mind, we loved it!

McNAUGHT: It was the raw energy of that band. They were teetering on the edge of chaos. They were forging something new, and that's what gave them the energy and the buzz that I haven't really seen replicated since.

MONTGOMERY: The '91 UK/Europe tour was a peak time for the band. They were on an upward trajectory and it was still very new. You felt like you were part of something, the centre of the universe. **PETER WATTS**

at the stage and
tried to hurt myself
basically when the song
finished I kissed
Kurt's hand then
gave him a big hug
it was very emotional
After the show he
gave us a bottle of
champagne which I
opened and sprayed
all over the people
we was like four
T-shirts and all
three band had the
pictures taken together
we went to a party

rocking Sheffield. was
want to for a
walk into town with
Kurt and Go-go. Kurt
is unfathomable. He's
friendly but introverted
and I find it difficult
to talk to him because
I admire his group so much
and I don't like
talking about music with
him
A guy from select
mag interviewed me
back stage to see
us before the show
I was really nervous

TOUR DE FORCE

EURO '91: NIRVANA ON THE ROAD (AND ON TV)

AUG 23, 1991 Reading Festival

NOV 4, 1991 Bierkeller, Bristol

NOV 5, 1991 Astoria Theatre, London

NOV 6, 1991 Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton

NOV 8, 1991 The Word

NOV 10-25 European leg

NOV 26, 1991 University of Bradford

NOV 27, 1991 Hummingbird, Birmingham

NOV 28, 1991 Top Of The Pops broadcast/Octagon, University of Sheffield

NOV 29, 1991 Calton Studios, Edinburgh

NOV 30, 1991 QMU, University of Glasgow

DEC 1, 1991 The Southern Bar, Edinburgh

DEC 2, 1991 The Mayfair, Newcastle

DEC 3, 1991 Rock City, Nottingham

DEC 4, 1991 The Academy, Manchester

DEC 5, 1991 Kilburn National Ballroom

DEC 6, 1991 *Tonight With Jonathan Ross* broadcast

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS; EUGENE KELLY

On a plane: Kurt crowd-surfs in Frankfurt, November 12, 1991





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TAKE ME HIGHER

It is 1969 and **SLY STONE** is on the brink of superstardom. Ensclosed in his Bel Air mansion, he has begun work on a new album. But surrounded by dealers, groupies and gangsters, it takes over two years to finish the record – during which time the life-affirming utopianism of his music is replaced by darkness, drugs and isolation. Fifty years on, band members recall the turbulent making of a masterpiece: *There's A Riot Goin' On*. “Fame attracts wonderful people,” hears Michaelangelo Matos. “But fame also attracts guns and dogs.”

FOR Sly Stone, Sunday, August 17, 1969 was an auspicious date. The weather was bad, but despite the deluge Sly & The Family Stone took control of the Woodstock festival – coming on stage at 3am, they lured the bedraggled audience out of their sleeping bags and on to their feet for an extended, transcendent version of “I Want To Take You Higher”.

“There was about a foot-and-a-half deep of mud, it was raining so hard,” remembers saxophonist Jerry Martini. “It was an incredible mess.”

“It put everybody into a higher level of performance,” says bassist Larry Graham. “We knew we’d tapped into a new zone. We wanted the next concert to feel musically like the Woodstock concert. That was our new measuring stick.”

Captured and amplified in Michael Wadleigh’s concert film, Stone’s irrepressible performance was one of Woodstock’s undoubted highlights – a riot of afro hair, white tassels, green satin, chunky jewellery and feather hats that captured both the Aquarian mood of guileless, free-spirited optimism and Stone’s immutable star power.

Both Wadleigh’s film and the three-disc soundtrack album were major successes, significantly bolstering the band’s profile in the States. Their label, Epic Records, re-serviced “I Want To Take You Higher” to radio, where it charted alongside Ike & Tina Turner’s version. But, the label stressed, this would not be treated as a new Sly & The Family Stone single. “New material from the star is expected in a matter of days”, reported trade magazine *Cash Box* that May.

Sly Stone on TV
show *The Midnight
Special*, Burbank,
California, 1971



SLY & THE FAMILY STONE



"We would always have a bunch of people around": Sly & The Family Stone circa 1971

It was an optimistic statement for an optimistic band. Certainly, after Woodstock, you could be forgiven for thinking that Stone had it all. And then, inexplicably, he began to throw it all away. A further two years followed before Sly & The Family Stone finally emerged with a new album. By which time the mood surrounding the band – and the nation – had darkened considerably. Released in November 1971, *There's A Riot Goin' On* stripped away the joyful, inclusive quality of Stone's earlier music and replaced it with something more intense and restless. Here is a collection of songs that are neither life-affirming nor are they irrepressible, but rather constructed in a manner that seems both obsessive and haphazard, full of twitchy avant-funk arrangements and awash in a narcoleptic haze. Stone's most storied album, *There's A Riot Goin' On* documents both the burnout of the hippie dream and Stone's own disillusionment with his post-Woodstock fame.

"I don't want to say, 'Look what happened,'" says drummer Greg Errico. "But the challenges being a rock'n'roll star could bring you, whether it be the drugs or all the attention – it felt like it could turn out to be not necessarily a good thing. The price? I don't know if it was worth it."

SLY & The Family Stone embodied the brightest hopes of America during the '60s. The best of their early songs, such as "Stand!" and "Everyday People", were inspirational beacons, performed by the era's most prominent integrated act.

"Sly was raised up in a family environment, which it was always when you got a bunch of brothers and sisters, and they all got friends," says Larry Graham. "So that's gonna be Sly's

friends, Freddie's friends, Rose's friends, Vet's friends. Being raised like that, he would always have a bunch of people around."

Before founding of Sly & The Family Stone in 1966, Stewart had worked as a DJ for the R&B station KSOL-FM in San Francisco, playing anything he felt like. That progressive mix was reflected in The Family Stone – men and women, black and white, funk and psychedelia; all were welcome. 1968's single "Dance To The Music" became a Top 10 hit and had a profound impact on Stone's peers. Motown responded with The Temptations' "I Can't Get Next To You" and The



Jackson 5's "I Want You Back" among others.

But after Woodstock, the revolution Sly & The Family Stone seemed to represent began running aground. The Chicago Seven trial began in September 1969, dragging on through February 1970 and returning convictions for the defendants and their lawyers. Altamont,

in December 1969, had gone from a "West Coast Woodstock" to a murder site. The same month, Black Panthers leader Fred Hampton was killed by police. Early 1970 was a quagmire – making bombs in the basement of a New York townhouse, the Weather Underground accidentally blew up the building in March. On May 4, four student protesters were shot dead by National Guardsmen at Kent State University in Ohio. Eleven days later, 11 students were murdered by state and local police at Jackson State College in Mississippi.

Retreat and malaise were becoming default settings for the culture – and for Sly Stone as well. Woodstock's success meant that many of Sly & The Family Stone's 1970 gigs were at festivals modelled on Woodstock – or would have been, had the band actually played them all. Stone began showing up hours late, sometimes skipping them altogether – 26 times out of 80 gigs that year.

Even when The Family Stone were on time for a gig, their crowds in particular gained a reputation for being unruly. A month prior to Woodstock, they'd driven the crowd at the Newport Jazz Festival to an alarming frenzy. "When Sly called out for 'You Can Make It If You Try', they crashed the gates – 30,000 people went running through everything," says Martini. The crowd destroyed



"We'd tapped into a new zone": Sly onstage at Woodstock, Aug 17, 1969

the festival's entrance, as well as the band's tour buses. "We had to take cabs back to New York," says Martini.

It was a lot worse in Chicago. Sly had already cancelled twice there before July, when they were scheduled to play outdoors at Grant Park. At the last minute, the city itself called off the show, just before the band arrived. "We were in limousines, driving through downtown with a police escort," says Greg Errico. "All of a sudden, we took a U-turn: 'There's a riot. We're taking you to the airport to get you out here.'"

The riot lasted five hours, with Chicago police shooting three people and arresting 150. "I didn't know what happened until that evening, when I got home," says Errico. "Everybody's in the living room watching the news. We see a police car turned upside down, burning. I'm going, 'Holy shit.' They're saying it's because apparently Sly Stone didn't show up. It could have been avoided if they'd just gotten us there and we did the show. Or maybe it would have been a worse outcome – who knows?"

IN Autumn 1969, Sly held a band meeting to announce that he was moving to Los Angeles. "The rest of us made eye contact with each other," says Errico. "This may be a little heavy handed, but it was like, 'Wow – frightening. This is the beginning of the end.'"

"Los Angeles, to me, is Sodom and Gomorrah," adds Martini. "When he was up north, we were still a family. When he went to Los Angeles, his personality changed, everything changed."

Sly moved into a luxury mansion at 783 Bel Air Road – the former home of The Mamas & The Papas' John and Michelle Phillips in LA's exclusive Coldwater Canyon. "It was a beautiful, beautiful home," remembers Larry Graham. "It was a nice area. It was a nice-sized house – a lot of bedrooms, a lot of space, big living room." The area was not especially friendly toward Sly. "There weren't a whole lot of black people in Bel Air then, so the Bel Air police were always harassing him," says Martini. Martini and his wife stayed there for six months. "I boarded up my house in Marin County and came out," the saxophonist recalls. But eventually the two were displaced from the guesthouse and left the compound entirely. "When he moved to LA," says Martini, "the entourage started."

The stories of Sly Stone's time in Bel Air are legion. Cocaine was everywhere, as was PCP. There'd always been drugs around – Sly called the



Sly stoned: doing a radio interview, San Diego, 1969

song "I Want To Take You Higher" for a reason. "It was already happening," confirms Errico of Stone's slide into addiction. "It wasn't like the next day he moved down there and the next week the world changed. It took time – but it wasn't that long, either. Within a year. Look at all the victims during that time. It's a lot of carnage. I mean, LA was just more intense. Here's the business, here's the creative centre, here's all the money and all the attention and the parties. Instead of a five-times magnifying glass, it's a 20-times magnifying glass. But you're still magnifying what's already there."

"The hangers-on were the reason we missed so many gigs, and the reason why his reputation went down the tubes," says Jerry Martini. "These people held him back. It was heartbreaking to watch how it happened. Fame

"WHEN HE WENT TO LOS ANGELES, EVERYTHING CHANGED"

JERRY MARTINI

attracts wonderful people. Fame also attracts guns and dogs. They hung around and hung on to him, keeping him out of contact with the rest of the human race for their own personal gain."

By the spring of 1971, Errico had had enough. His first replacement, Gerry Gibson, was short-lived. Next came Andy Newmark, whose

previous gig had been with Carly Simon – a world diametrically opposite from Sly's. "It was a climate of guns, cocaine, pimps, really hardcore street-tough people," says Newmark. "Women were not treated nice. Any women in Sly's circle were completely subservient to him. They stood by silently and would never speak a word out of turn, unless spoken to. I would try to make conversation with them, but they were hesitant to get friendly with me and just open up and be normal for fear of being disciplined by Sly."

Newmark recalls the abundance of guns. "It was a common sight. In that period, some people thought it was cool to be carrying a gun – that kind of street-gangster mentality. With all the cocaine, people were paranoid. The next natural step when you're paranoid, when you think somebody wants to hurt you, is to get a gun."

"The counterpoint to all this is that their father, KC Stewart, was always around," Newmark continues. "He always had a tie and jacket on, perfectly well spoken, super-conservative, churchgoing people, polite. And when he was around, man, Sly and Freddie and all of them ➤

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; ECHOES/REDFERNS



Friend of the family: Bobby Womack

"IT AIN'T NO FUN NO MORE"

How Bobby Womack shared the highs – and lows – of working with Sly

THERE was also a surfeit of guest musicians on *There's A Riot Goin' On* – among them Bobby Womack. He was also recording upstairs in Bel Air, laying down two albums, *Communication* and *Understanding*, in the space of a week. "I was in a creative frame of mind," Womack told *NME* in 1976. "That was right at the time

I met Sly. I'd been divorced and he was hanging free – a little too free as it's turned out, but it was good for me because I needed to release that energy."

Speaking to *Rolling Stone* in 1984, Womack described the period as "blowing as much coke as I could blow. And drinking. And smoking weed and taking pills. Doing that all

day, staying up seven, eight days. Me and Sly were running partners."

But the good times didn't last. "Later," Womack told the *NME* in 1984, "you give Sly one hit and he be lookin' around the room, very paranoid, you couldn't make no music with him. He be talkin' to you, but he ain't there. So I just said, 'It ain't no fun no more.'"

In one of his last interviews, Womack talked about his time with Stone in Michael Rubenstone's 2017 documentary *On The Sly: In Search Of The Family Stone*. "Bobby was a straight-shooter, he didn't hide anything," Rubenstone told *Uncut*. "After we'd done, he'd start frying up pork chops in his kitchen, shirt off."

SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

snapped to attention. They would turn into children: ‘Oh, quick, Daddy’s coming! Put the cocaine away!’ The minute the father was around, everybody was on their best behaviour. He would say: ‘You call your mother tomorrow. You understand me?’ ‘Yes, Daddy.’ They had a very conservative upbringing, and for them to all act like crazy gangsters was this funny juxtaposition.”

A STONISHINGLY, considering the distractions, music was still being made – but at Sly’s pace, not Epic’s. The label and public were hungry for a new Family Stone album; the two-and-a-half-year gap between *Stand!* and *There’s A Riot Goin’ On* was unprecedented. Sly was under an enormous amount of pressure to deliver.

Recording *Riot...* took place in a number of studios, including LA’s Record Plant and three different CBS Studios in New York, Chicago and Hollywood. “When he was still recording at the Record Plant, they had a studio built down deep,” says Martini. This acoustically dead sunken space was dubbed The Pit; a maroon plush carpet covered every surface, including the stairs. “He had his own [mixing] board and he had a heart-shaped bed at the Record Plant,” says Martini. “I used to sleep in the studio. I would be in the studio two or three days and so would Cynthia [Robinson, trumpeter and vocalist].”

Meanwhile, the Bel Air mansion became the site of the album’s creation myth. Stone also installed a recording studio on the mansion’s second floor – establishing the kind of work-play space favoured by the Stones during their Nellcôte sojourn or by Beastie Boys at their G-Son studio-cum-clubhouse.

“It felt like a regular studio,” says Graham. “He had first-class equipment. I think having the studio in his house allowed him to be more spontaneous and capture stuff as it came into his mind.”

“There were a lot of overdubs, because Sly was in his experimentation stage,” adds Martini. “He would stay up for days at a time. He was a marathon man.”

Among the songs Stone pored over was “Thank You For Talkin’ To Me Africa”. The song is a decelerated remake of 1969 No 1 “Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)” that Errico claims was recorded at the same time.

“There’s six different versions of ‘Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)’, trying to get to where it’s going,” says Errico. “These were conscious efforts to craft this song to the best that it could be. The songs would grow and morph. Sly had Michael Carabello, the original conga player in Santana, come in and play on it. You wouldn’t recognise it. But it never found its way to maturity. But ‘...Africa’ found its way to maturity. It’s the same song, but half-time, slow, dark, dirty, funky.”

With its imperious groove resembling a funk version of Black Sabbath, “Thank You For Talkin’ To Me Africa” set the pace for the new album. It also signalled a difference in methodology. Though Graham’s fuzz bass had been a Family Stone signature, on *There’s A Riot Goin’ On*, Graham “sat in the control room with Sly and the engineer, closer to the board, and plugged in right there, with the speakers pumping. There



ExtendedFamily: (clockwise from this photo) Sly at home, September 1972; Andy Newmark in 1979; Larry Graham circa 1970



wouldn’t be a bunch of feedback coming through the speakers, because I’m plugged in direct. That wasn’t as much fuzztone as on previous albums.”

Sly & The Family Stone had recorded their first album, *A Whole New Thing* (1967), live in the studio, but now Sly was recording everything himself and bringing in the others as he needed them. Graham, for his part, only played on five of the album’s 12 tracks.

“When I would go down to Los Angeles, I was mostly hearing the music for the first time,” adds Graham. Nobody in the band or at the label would

“WHEN I TRIED TO LEAVE THE STUDIO, THE DOOR WAS LOCKED”

ANDY NEWMARK

hear *There’s A Riot Goin’ On* until Sly finished it – whenever that would be.

While an entourage socialised, often illicitly, downstairs, upstairs some of the era’s most interesting characters often drifted in and out of the second-storey sessions. Musicians including Bobby Womack, Ike Turner, and Billy Preston. “I remember Bobby Womack being on a few gigs – and Sly never let anybody sit in,” says Errico.

Graham also notes, “When we’d go to record, I was up there [in the studio] by myself, not distracted by anything else. I’m there for business.” It wasn’t always easy – Stone was beginning to play head games with his band members and his entreaties to the players to come

over and overdub their parts sometimes had a sinister edge. Once, Stone’s armed bodyguards showed up at drummer Andy Newmark’s house in LA in the middle of the night, saying, “He wants you. And if I have to grab you by the back of the neck, I’m not going to go back to the house without you.” Once Newmark got there, he says, “Sly behaved like a dictator. When I wanted to leave the studio, the door was locked. I’d say, ‘Hey, man, I’ve got to go.’ Sly would sometimes not unlock the door for an hour or two, just to make me sit in this room.”

Newmark pauses. “Am I creating some kind of atmosphere for you?”

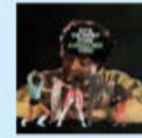
F INALLY, days before The Family Stone were scheduled to play Madison Square Garden in early September 1971, Sly Stone turned in his album. A lot had happened since the last one. His manager David Kapralik had attempted suicide three times, bringing in promoter Ken Roberts to right the ship. “He had promoted a lot of shows where Sly no-showed,” says Errico. “There were suits against Sly.” Shortly after the release of *There’s A Riot Goin’ On*, Roberts took over the band’s management.

The New York tickets sold fast. “There are not many stars around today who could sell out MSG for three straight nights (over 60,000 seats) after being totally absent from recording (or much of anything else – he’s been a notorious no-show on some previous concert dates),” *Cash Box* reported in September 1971.

A month later, the first signs of new music from Stone finally emerged. The slippery, glistening groove of “Family Affair” became the band’s biggest single, selling over 2.5 million copies. “He hit a new high bar with that,” acknowledges

BUYER'S GUIDE

Sly's long-players in a nutshell



A WHOLE NEW THING (1967)

Sly & The Family Stone's debut was loaded with intricate arrangements. "Advice" resembled avant-garde composer Terry Riley as much as soul radio. "Trip To Your Heart" took its own title literally with dense, swirling harmonies and a freakout ending.



DANCE TO THE MUSIC (1968)

"A repetitive theme interspersed with shtick" was how Family Stone manager David Kapralik described "Dance To The Music" – but it was brilliant shtick. The album was more, and less, of the same, including a 12-minute medley that predicted the disco remix.



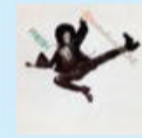
LIFE (1968)

The first Family Stone album that adds up to more than the sum of its parts: the hooks punch throughout. But it's still a tad straight-laced compared with its successors – it took a shade more wildness to burst.



STAND! (1969)

Sly at his Aquarian peak: "Stand!" and "Everyday People" and "You Can Make It If You Try" are simultaneously inspirational and no-BS, and the rhythms are commanding and buoyant throughout. It stayed on the charts for two years, for good reason.



FRESH (1973)

Riot's follow-up contained funk just as jagged as its predecessor. But the feel was a lot friendlier, with the peak track, a cover of "Que Sera, Sera," a tongue-in-cheek dig at rumours of romance between Sly and Doris Day (her son, Terry Melcher, was an engineer on *Riot*).



SMALL TALK (1974)

Things take a turn for the automatic lyrically, with the titles like "Time For Livin'" and "Can't Strain My Brain" telling the tale. The grooves move plenty, but only on "Loose Booty" do things really explode.



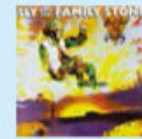
HEARD YA MISSED ME, WELL I'M BACK (1976)

His arrangements were still daring, but the tunes themselves had gone completely slack. "Sexy Situation" is as prim as Doris Day.



BACK ON THE RIGHT TRACK (1979)

Sly's liveliest album since *Stand!* – but the fall-off in his songwriting reduces the good grooves to something less than memorable.



AIN'T BUT THE ONE WAY (1982)

The first Jackson 5 hit aped the Family Stone model; here, Sly's slick grooves and vocal trade-offs resemble disco-era Jacksons. It's not an improvement.



Fresh faces: Sly (on drums) with Larry Graham's replacement Rustee Allen, Cynthia Robinson and Jerry Martini, April 3, 1973

Newmark. "It was a great song with great lyrics. His vocal performance could not be duplicated by another human being on Earth."

Accordingly, anticipation around the album release was so high, it was certified gold the day of release, chalking up 800,000 copies in advance orders. Meanwhile, the album's fraught production history became part of its sales pitch. David Kapralik sent a photo of Sly around the industry inscribed with the message: "Two years was a short time to wait for a work of genius!" He called the album "intensely autobiographical... Sylvester stripped his soul bare, and what has emerged is an affirmation of life." A Columbia Records ad in *Record Mirror* that December called *There's A Riot Goin' On* "A dangerous album even for the converted".

Yet despite the success of *There's A Riot Goin' On* – it reached No 1 on the American album charts in late '71 – Sly & The Family Stone didn't perform "Family Affair" – or any of the new songs, for that matter – during the subsequent tour. "By that time, we would just play the hits when we went on the road," says Martini. Already it seemed that *There's A Riot Goin' On* was too raw to revisit.



Mohawk, mo' problems: Sly at the Grammy Awards, 2006

Fresh, their sixth album, in 1973, Newmark recalls, "We did about 40 shows, ending in December, all of which were payback shows to promoters that he had screwed by not showing up." After the tour finale, on December 18, in Cleveland, Newmark's cheque for \$2,500 bounced, prompting him to become a full-time freelancer. "I just thought, 'Well, the record's done, my name is on it. I've gotten out of it what I want to get out of it.'"

Sly Stone seemed to want out too. He made albums regularly until 1982 – yet titles like *Heard Ya Missed Me, Well I'm Back* (1976) and *Back On The Right Track* (1979) only amplified the sense that he'd lost his way completely. Each album sold fewer copies and made less impact. In 1971, he could sell out Madison Square Garden after releasing no new music in nearly two years; by 1974 the only way he could fill the Garden's 20,000 seats was to stage his wedding there.

Aside from a handful of guest spots on other artist's albums – Funkadelic's *The Electric Spanking Of War Babies* (1981) and Jesse Johnson's *Shockadelica* (1986) – and appearances at various tributes like the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 1993 and the

2006 Grammy Awards, Stone has been most famous as a recluse. There have been sporadic sightings since, not least the revelations in 2011 that Stone was living in a camper van in Los Angeles, where he was fighting to recover millions of dollars in missing royalty payments. But the music, especially *There's A Riot Goin' On*, remains indelible – irreducible to mere nostalgia, somehow enlarged by the passage of time.

And how is Sly Stone doing in 2021? Although rumours about his health have never fully disappeared, Martini reveals that he has spoken to his former bandmate recently. "He's doing really good," he confirms to *Uncut*. "I thank God that Sly's still alive. He sounds good and he looks good now. He's been straight for over eight months. He's already outlived most of his contemporaries.

"It's been a long trip..."

THE atomisation of the band accelerated in the aftermath of *There's A Riot Goin' On*. In early 1973, Larry Graham and Stone had a "big blowout" backstage at LA Coliseum. "Sly and Larry were feuding and not getting along and it all exploded finally," says Newmark. "There were just very, very bad vibes, weird vibes – a lot of threats and people carrying guns around that shouldn't have guns. No-one got hurt. But that was the exit for Larry."

To Newmark, "Once Greg and Larry left, the band were a mere shadow, going through the motions. The tunes were really fast, like he just wanted to get it over with. We would be on and off the stage in less than an hour. It was no longer a band; it was just a paycheck."

When Sly & The Family Stone went on tour behind

Back To Black

by Amy Winehouse

Desolate and cinematic, the hit the Queen of Camden created with young producer Mark Ronson would become her timeless swansong

WE remember Amy Winehouse now as a towering icon of popular culture, a tragic totem of natural talent in an unfeeling world – but back in 2005 she was just another young singer flitting in and out of the public eye. Those eyeliner swooshes were mere wingettes, her beehive in larval form. She'd released *Frank* two years earlier and enjoyed the first flushes of fame in the UK but was little known in America, where *Frank* would not even get a release until 2007.

When she wasn't contractually obliged to be on stage, Amy would be holding court in Camden pubs, revelling in the attention and falling hard, fast and very publicly for Blake Fielder-Civil.

What she wasn't doing much of was writing. She'd gained a bit of a reputation for procrastinating at this point. "We heard from Salaam [*Remi, who produced most of Frank*] saying that she just always took so long to write," says assistant engineer Mike Makowski, dragging out his O's for dramatic effect. But two things happened that sped the

creative process along. First, she had her heart broken by Fielder-Civil. Second, she met Mark Ronson. Winehouse realised a musical kinship with the young producer; she knew that she wanted a '60s girl-group sound, while Ronson had an ear for a hook and an affection for vintage studio equipment. The pair famously came up with "Rehab" while wandering down a New York street. But the devastating, funereal "Back To Black" would come together bit by bit.

Binky Griptite, former guitarist with the Dap-Kings, remembers Ronson turning up to the studio with a CD packed with "little

KEY PLAYERS



Homer Steinweiss
Drums



Binky Griptite
Guitar



Mike Makowski
Assistant engineer



Chris Elliott
Orchestral arrangement

recordings of the tunes and the chords and whatnot", and a vision for the song developed throughout the sessions: the first was in the Daptone Studios in Bushwick, Brooklyn, before Amy laid down her vocals at Chung King Studios in Manhattan. Finally, the orchestration was added at Metropolis in London.

The result was spectacular. Even 15 years later, there's something quietly majestic in the song's melodrama. The video, directed by Phil Griffin, feels eerily prophetic when seen from 2021: Amy leads a funeral procession to a headstone that reads "RIP The Heart of Amy Winehouse".

The album *Back To Black* launched Amy into the stratosphere. She became a household name on both sides of the Atlantic and was forced to contend with all the unwanted press attention that brought. Though no-one knew it at the time, it was to be her swansong: July marks 10 years since she passed away in her Camden home from alcohol poisoning.

But *Back To Black* stands as a classic, a song and album that continue to strike chords with fans who were too young to be aware of Amy herself. "Even though I didn't really know," Homer Steinweiss says of the song, "I kind of felt it."

KATE SOLOMON

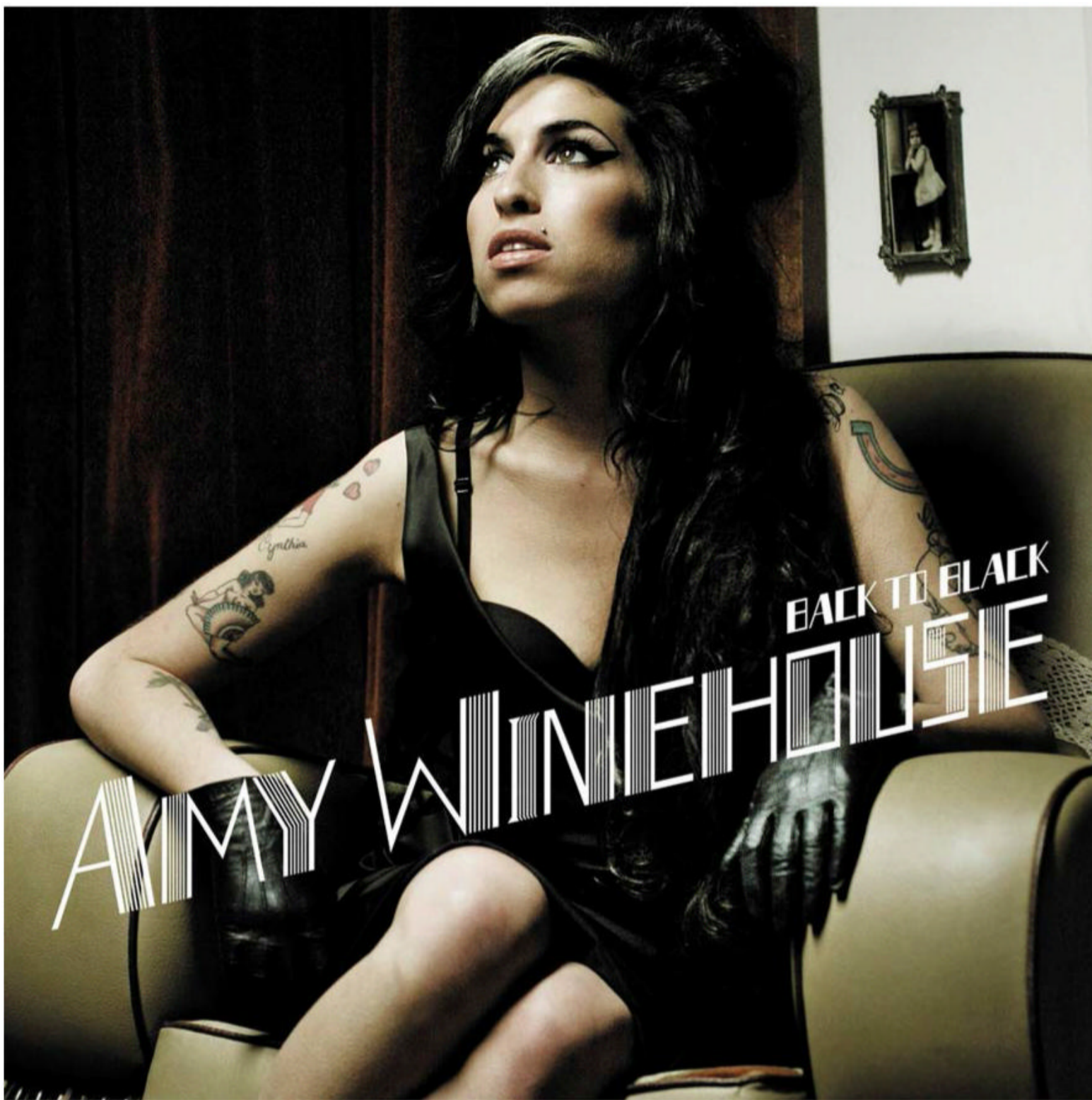
BINKY GRIPTITE: Amy working with Mark seemed like a last-minute, surprise thing. He was working on his own record and put it aside to do hers, it seemed.

HOMER STEINWEISS: Mark had been working with the Dap-Kings' horn section for a Robbie Williams album, I think, or something like that. Then when Mark started working with Amy, he was like, "Man, I could use like a whole band on this kind of sound."

MISCHA RICHTER/STEPHEN J. COHEN/GETTY IMAGES; EARL GIBSON/III/WIREIMAGE



"She was the life of the party": Amy in 2006



GRIP TITE: We said OK but we didn't really think much of it. I mean, nobody knew that it was gonna be so huge. I was actually convinced that she would never make it. I couldn't imagine somebody with a name like Wine... house? Not a rock-star name to me. I was just like, "She's never gonna make it."

MIKEMAKOWSKI: I worked at Chung King studios in New York. I started interning there – you had to pretty much work eight months for free, four 12-hour shifts a week. I'd just started getting in on all the sessions at the time when Mark started working with Amy.

GRIP TITE: I noticed that she was really into kids. She would always have to ask me about my daughter. "How's your likkle one?" I brought my daughter to soundcheck once, and even though Amy was tired of singing "Rehab", when I requested it for my daughter she just smiled, said "No problem" and went right into it. That was cool.

MAKOWSKI: Between her and Mark, they're so laid-back. He would literally come in a white undershirt that looked like he just woke up in it. "Hey, what's up?" Amy, the only thing she was always saying was, "I can't wait to get home to my Blakey."

"Amy said very, very bluntly to Mark, 'I don't want any fucking strings on the record'"

CHRIS ELLIOTT

STEINWEISS: She was really sweet and really great. When she was here she was a blast. She was the life of the party and just funny as hell.

GRIP TITE: There were no secrets with her though – she was deadly honest in that way. You knew what mood she was in.

MAKOWSKI: Oh, I got to be honest with you, I thought maybe she was a new artist because she literally looked like... well, I looked at her shoes. I was like, "Man, you gotta get this girl some shoes or something?" They were busted out – what the hell! She was probably just like, "Who cares?" Her and Mark were just so chill.

STEINWEISS: We recorded at Daptone Studios – it's a house in Bushwick turned into a recording studio. The back room was a live room and in the middle there was a drum booth. If you want to really isolate your drums, the only actual way to do that is to have a room that is completely floated. Usually that's done with specific types of rubber and you need specific types of weight. But Gabe [*Roth, co-founder of Daptone Records*] was just like, "Yeah, but tyres would work even better." And he went down the block and found a bunch of tyres and put them in.

GRIP TITE: Mark had said it was on that girl-group vibe, Shangri-Las, and all that. We didn't do the whole Phil Spector thing, it wasn't like a giant wall of sound. It's the intersection between soul music and girl-group style.

STEINWEISS: On "Back To Black", I think it was all pretty much in the demo. The drum beat was there and the sections were kind of there. The input we had was more in providing the feeling and the sound to complete the parts.

GRIP TITE: When we started tracking "Back To Black", there wasn't much space for me, sonically. So I was at

a bit of a loss for what to play. I just wound up improvising for the whole song. I didn't know how it was gonna get used or if I was playing too much. Mark left me off of the front half of the song and then brought me in towards the middle through to the end. So I was the one playing all this surfy, single-note guitar stuff.

CHRIS ELLIOTT: The guitar part had made me think of Ennio Morricone's spaghetti westerns – he's one of my biggest heroes and there was just something of that in the middle section. Lots of latitude and this atmospheric, passionate, filmic feel.

STEINWEISS: It's a very simple drum pattern but it's actually one of the hardest things for me to do in a session. It's like a shuffle and I don't really do a lot of those, so I was happy that it was so simple. The simpler it is, the easier it is for me to keep the shuffle going.

GRIP TITE: Mark has good instincts in the studio. He knows what he's looking for. Or even if he doesn't necessarily know what he's looking for, he always knows when it's not it. We don't waste a lot of time going in the wrong direction. He is really good at knowing when to guide us versus when to just let us do our own thing. ➤



"Deadly honest": Winehouse on stage at Camden's Koko, November 14, 2006



something like this. There are quite hard surfaces. You wouldn't get many producers wanting to do strings in there, because the sounds are quite hard and the reflections are really strong and difficult. But it's not unlike some of the studios that would have been around in the '60s. I think it was probably part of Mark's genius that he did that, he knew that would work.

STEINWEISS: I feel like Mark's role in making that record, whether or not he came up with a sound or anything, was putting the right people together. By putting Amy with the Dap-Kings and using her songs, then finding that sound with the band, I think that was a very big contribution to the success of the record and how good the record ended up being.

ELLIOTT: We did a big percussion session after the strings – just filled the studio with all these different percussion instruments. The

percussion guy we used was called Frank, who was quite a workmanlike chap, a little cockney. We were using the timpani, so I said, "Can you just play the bass part?" He found he could tune the tims to be the five notes in the bass part. It dawned on him that we were going to do the whole song. He said to me, "This isn't what you do with tims – they're just for punctuation. It's not the whole thing!" It would be just in the background, behind the real bass. So you wouldn't really even hear it fully, it would just be like an aura. It was lovely, because when you hit those drums, softly I mean, it's a lovely wide sound. It adds a sort of majesty to it.

I really wanted to put a tubular bell in there, which I did. And when it came back, the producer was really excited, kept saying to me, "They absolutely love it. They love that it sounds like a film score, but they really loved the bells of death!"

When I heard it for the very first time I thought, 'It feels like it's telling this story, like a movie or something.' So I'm sure she would've thought, 'These aren't the strings I thought I was gonna get.' I don't think the strings would be on the record if she hadn't liked it.

STEINWEISS: I've worked on a lot of records and a lot of records that I'm really proud of. But that record holds like a special place: I think it is one of the best records I've ever worked on. Any other session, no matter how good it is, we'll compare it to that. 🎧

Kate Solomon's biography, *Amy Winehouse*, is published by Orion

MAKOWSKI: All the music the Dap-Kings recorded was at a different studio. But it was recorded on one-inch 16-track reel-to-reel tape. So at Chung King, we would have to rent whatever that tape machine was and then Mark would bring in the tapes and I would basically run the tapes through the big Neve board and then into Pro Tools. It was a stylistic decision, I guess, getting that type of old-school Motown sound off the tape. All the songs were written in this way that you literally could hit record, she would sing the song all the way through, done. Mark would say, "OK, that was amazing." Amy would reply, "Mark, I'll sing it through one more time because I know you'd like to have a comp." But it was the first take, every time. With Amy, I don't even think we tuned any of her vocals – maybe the tiniest little bit.

GRIPITTE: I didn't necessarily get the impression that the subject matter or anything was hard for her to sing. The only thing I noticed was she was pretty bored of singing "Rehab".

MAKOWSKI: We recorded "Back To Black" last out of the five songs we did – just so she wasn't upset. I wouldn't say she was ever visibly upset, but you want to start off with the happier songs. I remember we turned the lights way down for that and "Love Is A Losing Game".

ELLIOTT: Mark Ronson, Darcus [Beese, from Island Records] and Tom [Elmhirst] heard the mixes and felt there could be another colour in the tracks. They didn't want it to come from the same sound world as Frank. Tom mentioned strings.

FACT FILE

Released: October 27, 2006
Written by: Amy Winehouse, Mark Ronson
Produced by: Mark Ronson
Recorded at: Daptone Studios, Chung King Studios (NYC), Metropolis Studios (London)
Highest chart position: UK 8; US 19
Personnel includes: Amy Winehouse (vocals), Binky Griptite (guitars), Nick Movshon (bass), Homer Steinweiss (drums), Chris Elliott (orchestral arrangements), Victor Axelrod (piano), Chris Tombling, Warren Zielinski, Everton Nelson (violin), Jon Thorne, Katie Wilkinson, Rachel Bott (viola), Andy Mackintosh (alto sax), Jamie Talbot (tenor sax), Dave Bishop (baritone sax), Frank Ricotti (percussion)

"That record holds a special place. It is one of the best I've ever worked on"

HOMER STEINWEISS

Amy wasn't really a fan of the idea of strings. In fact she said very, very bluntly to Mark, "I don't want any fucking strings on the record."

I had no idea or expectation about Mark. I threw down some quick ideas. Mark breezed in, really charming. We went through each song, twice. I had them in Logic and he just literally edited out a few notes. When Mark was leaving, he said, "Oh, by the way, before I forget – Amy really hates strings." I said, "We'll keep it low and *treme*." So low as in pitch and *treme* as in *tremolando*, which is where the strings are almost shaking or shivering. It's a spooky kind of sound.

The strings went really high in the middle section of "Back To Black". I'm very much a film-centric composer and love getting all the atmosphere in. When I say the strings went higher at that point, they just went to a tension – soft, but they're there. Say if it was in a movie, it would be – "What's going to happen now, who's going to come in the door?"

We recorded the strings at Metropolis, which is a slightly unusual place to record

TIMELINE

September 14, 1983 Amy Winehouse is born in North London
2003 Now with 19 Management,

Amy releases her first album, the jazz-tinged *Frank*, with Salaam Remi on production duties
2004 Amy and Salaam

win an Ivor Novello award for "Stronger Than Me"
2005 She meets Mark Ronson and the two collaborate on six tracks

for *Back To Black*
April 30, 2007 The song "Back To Black" is released in the UK
2008 Amy wins a record-

tying five Grammys for *Back To Black*
July 23, 2011 Amy is found dead in her Camden home



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SEASIDE RESIDENCIES

FIFTH BEATLES ASSESSED COMPETENTLY

ALL UK RELEASES, UNEQUALLED IN QUALITY PICTURED CHRONOLOGICALLY

MR. B. EPSTEIN
MR. S. SUTCLIFFE
MR. P. BEST
MR. A. KLEIN
WILL ALL APPEAR

THE EVOLVING FRIENDSHIP OF MR HARRISON AND MR CLAPTON

DETAILED SEATING PLANS

HALLUCINOGENIC DRUGS

THE WHOLE ENTERTAINMENT WILL BE FOUND MORAL, INSTRUCTIVE AND AMUSING

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SPARKS

MAELSTRO

Fifty years after releasing their first album as Halfnelson, **SPARKS** are finally ready for their close-up. A new documentary, *The Sparks Brothers*, directed by Edgar Wright, pays tribute to the indomitable, pioneering spirit of music's oddest couple. "People expect us to try to alienate them from time to time," they tell Stephen Troussé...

Photo by AARON RAPOPORT



M!

Family ties:
Russell and
Ron Mael,
2005





Early electricity: Russell, and below inset, Ron at the Pheasantry, London, November 1972



Bad young brothers in Copenhagen, Denmark, 1975

“Is the Sparks story even that interesting?” wonders Ron Mael aloud, with one of those quizzical frowns that over 50 years have variously signalled wry mockery, abject despair, ironic ennui or absurd determination. “We joked about this with Edgar [Wright] when we began work on *The Sparks Brothers* project. Because other bands in documentaries usually have a tragic ending – you know, a suicide – or they had a drug issues and were able to overcome their habit to win in the end, or their career had a meteoric rise then a tragic fall... But our story didn’t fit into any of those categories. We found ourselves saying: “Guys, is there anything interesting about us to really warrant a movie..?””

It’s not the first time Sparks have failed to fit into established formats. Yet this summer sees one more of those periodical cosmic alignments that have occurred through the brothers’ career – where this most singular, perverse and eccentric group miraculously chimes with the times – like a comet, determinedly following its lonely elliptical orbit through the dark for years, to suddenly blaze once more across the horizon of public attention.

In July, *Annette*, their decade-in-the-making collaboration with Leos Carax, the holy terror of modern French cinema, is finally set to open – at the Cannes Film Festival, no less. “Cannes!” sighs Ronald, giddy as a schoolgirl. “It’s the most magical word to us!”

But first there is *The Sparks Brothers*, Edgar Wright’s bravura, breathless, screwball documentary which rounds up collaborators and famous fans for a tour of the weirdest half century in pop history. You can imagine one day *The Sparks Story* being a told as a fully fictionalised MGM biopic, as fabulously far-fetched as that version of the Cole Porter story starring Cary Grant. Or maybe in the style of Todd Haynes’ *I’m Not There* with different brothers played by different actors at different phases of their career: “Can I suggest Benedict Cumberbatch?” wonders Ron.

Wright’s documentary throws in a fair amount of fabulation and some lovely sequences of animation,



“I HOPE THE FILM INSPIRES OTHER ARTISTS”
EDGAR WRIGHT

but for the most part sticks faithfully to the facts, although there is some understandable haziness about the early days – “We thought it might be like a pop version of *Rashomon*,” chuckles Russell. Wittingly, it presents the brothers as great pop survivors and pioneers.

It must feel like a lifetime achievement award – or being present at your own funeral?

“That’s true,” agrees Ron. “One of our fears and one of our hesitations about having a documentary done about Sparks by anybody was just that funereal aspect of it – like we’re at the end and now we’re look back. There are many reasons that we agreed to work with Edgar. Most of all we considered him an incredible filmmaker. But his sensibility seemed in tune with ours. He saw what we were doing now as being as valid as what we had done for past decades, and so that was the final selling point for us.”

“Being fans of Edgar’s work, we thought if he could just apply his stylistic abilities and his sensibility and tone to Sparks’ entire story, then it then it seemed to us it couldn’t help but be an interesting film,” says Russell. “We joked with Edgar and said, ‘Can you please make it an Edgar Wright film – don’t save your good stuff for your real movies?’ He really succeeded: it’s got that kind of kinetic energy to it and it’s fast-paced even though it’s two hours and 20 minutes long. We’re really happy that it has his stamp on it.”

“I hope in that way that the film is really inspiring and empowering to other artists,” says Wright. “Sparks are not afraid to be who they are or the age



Two's company - Sparks in 1974: (l-r) Trevor White, Russ Mael, Norman 'Dinky' Diamond, Ron Mael, Ian Hampton, Adrian Fisher



I'm your fan: Edgar Wright with the Mael Brothers at the Sundance festival, 2021

that they are. If you were making a documentary about The Who or Aerosmith, the poster would be a photo of them in their pomp in the '60s or the '70s. *The Sparks Brothers* poster has Ron and Russell as they are now, in *their* seventies. I think it's quite empowering. It's saying yes, this is this is us now: Sparks is not an old man's band, Sparks is a going concern. I think it's an amazing thing that they

manage to still operate in popular music, having hit singles and albums that go into the Top 10 at that age."



ONE of the striking things aspects of Wright's film is the sense of Sparks over the course of 50 years becoming ever more ... *Sparksy*. As glam gave way to disco, gave way to new wave, gave way to synth-pop, gave way to house and beyond, decades of fashion have passed. Like Gilbert & George or David Hockney, the Mael brothers seem to have slowly refined

their inimitable style to an extent that they now seem more themselves than ever before.

"I totally agree," says Wright. "With Ron for sure it's not dissimilar to like Steve Coogan doing Alan Partridge - if you dress old when you're young, it just fits like a glove. Ron Mael on 1974 *Top Of The Pops* is not that far from Ron Mael in 2021 and that's great."

At times watching the film it's almost like the career, for all its mis-steps, the zigs when they should have zagged, the freakish crazes of popularity in London, Paris, Berlin and LA, has progressed exactly to the Maels' own inscrutable masterplan. "The documentary



Kind words: Todd Rundgren

definitely doesn't whitewash things but just the fact that it's all woven together makes it all seem... I don't know, somehow predestined?" ponders Ron. "Watching it now it all feels very reassuring! But there were moments over the years when we really had no assurance that anything was going to happen at all..."

You certainly couldn't have predicted the hysterical half century to follow from the clip of Mael boys looking earnestly preppy in the audience of the Ronettes' *TNT* show in 1966 - just one snippet from a vast archive of material Wright has unearthed to tell the Sparks story. As devoutly arty anglophiles stranded in a southern California awash with beards and denim, it seems a miracle they ever escaped.

That they did was due in no small part to the patronage of Todd Rundgren, who talks touchingly in the film of producing the first

"IF ANYTHING, IT'S A DRAMA"

Edgar Wright on making *The Sparks Brothers*

UNCUT: Ron and Russell say they were keen for the film to be an Edgar Wright movie - did you approach it in an auteurist way?

WRIGHT: I don't think I'm consciously bringing my style to a documentary, but I do think that me and Russell have a similar sense of humour. That's one of the reasons I've liked Sparks since I was five years old. There's something that Sparks do in their music where they're very sincere and passionate and yet there's still this self-reflexive element to it. This is one of the most remarkable things about the band and also maybe, for more mainstream audiences, something that holds your average pop listener slightly at arm's length, because they think, 'Wait, something clever-clever is going on.' I saw the way to approach the documentary as: I love Sparks. I love music documentaries. But that won't stop me from slightly making fun of the music. I thought that was the spirit of Sparks, basically and I just wanted to approach the documentary in the same way.

Did you have any other music documentaries in mind as models?

The influence was more about seeing the pitfalls in some documentaries. They're have been quite a few recently where I thought the filmmakers didn't give enough room to let the songs

breathe and let you fall in love with the band. With a Beatles documentary or the Stones, you don't have to worry about that because for the most part everybody knows the songs. When I got the cut down to around the two-hour mark I showed it to the [*Lego Movie*] director Phil Lord. He said, 'This is great, but if I had one criticism, I just want to hear a bit more of the songs.' So we let it open up a little. It's a 50-year career so we can go over two hours. It's not Billie Eilish! We've been really keen to get the word out that you do not need to know a single thing about this band going in - and in some ways it might be more enjoyable coming in as a complete Sparks virgin, because you get to discover all the things they've influenced.

The brothers were conscious of the lack of a conventional storyline to their career. What story do you think you told? If anything, it's a drama - how you can exist and stay true to yourself in

the face of public indifference. I showed it to Thomas Bangalter of Daft Punk and he said, "Every young person should watch this because it shows you that success doesn't necessarily mean likes and sales." Ron and Russell have always done everything on their own terms, so they have both successes and failures to be proud of.



SPARKS

album. “We hadn’t seen him since 1972,” says Ron, beaming with affection. “We always got along really well with him. He’s the one responsible for us even getting to this point. If he hadn’t been excited about the first demos that we did, which were rejected by *everybody* else, then nothing would have ever happened. For us **to pop** in during his interview after not seeing him for decades and decades, that was a really special moment for us. I’ve got such great respect for him. We’ve obviously gone down different musical paths, but the fact that he’s always kind of trying to reinvent himself and the fact that he’s still pushing it... I just really admire him.”

Wright jokes that he called the film *The Sparks Brothers* – the name that Albert Grossman blithely suggested after their 1971 debut as Halfnelson failed to set the world on fire – purely as a way to fondly wind up Ron and Russell. But by emphasising their filial bond – remarkable in a rock context that from The Kinks to Oasis more commonly thrives on sibling rivalry – the title strikes on the most compelling aspect of the story: an indestructible partnership forged, the film suggests, after the death of their father, when the boys were just 11 and 8. From then, an indomitable spirit has survived changes in fashion and the failure of long cherished projects plus long periods in the face of overwhelming critical and commercial indifference, while their stylistic offspring prospered. If hadn’t already been taken, a fitting alternative title might be *Sparks: Triumph Of The Will*.

The film tells the familiar story of their absurd mid-’70s UK success, where “This Town Ain’t Big Enough For Both Of Us” kickstarted a sensational run of albums. But it comes into its own on the winding road that followed: the disco reinvention (a beautiful cameo from Giorgio Moroder) becoming flavour of the month in France and Germany, returning to LA as conquering heroes as New Wave turned to MTV...

The unexpected heart of the documentary is an interview where sometimes Sparks percussionist, singer and muse Christi Haydon



Rogue Mael: shooting the cover of 1982's *Angst In My Pants*

breaks down in tears recalling the “six years of rainy days” following the collapse of *Mai The Psychic Girl* – a musical project they hoped to turn into a movie with Tim Burton. With nothing to show for years of work, no label and no interest on the horizon, the brothers dutifully kept clocking in at the home studio every day, writing and recording despite seemingly diminishing prospects.

“They sort of admit on camera that the Tim Burton project was probably a mistake,” says Wright. “If it had happened, of course, it would have been amazing – Tim was the hottest director in the world at that point, so you can understand from their perspective why they’d put all their chips on that number coming up.”

“It was really touching to see Christi’s interview,” admits Ron. “It’s probably not a story that we would tell ourselves. That’s something that we’re really happy that Edgar was able to convey – that there was this really emotional side to Sparks. From the outside, no-one knows what the inner workings of a band are. Of course, in a documentary like this you look at the really great times, but there are times that are less good...”

“Anybody in a band wants to have enormous commercial success,” reasons Russell. “But I think we’ve probably had *just the right amount* of success to keep pushing us to doing what we’re doing. I think it’s kind of an ideal situation. I think if we would have had just this enormous early success we would have been tempted to recreate that so as not to alienate people. But you know, we’re lucky because maybe it’s the quantity of people that follow us but then it’s also the *kind* of people that follows us – they expect us to try to alienate them from time to time.”

Wright has assembled a rich, varied and fervent selection of this audience, from the world of music – Stephen Morris recalls how when Joy Division were recording “Love Will Tear Us Apart” they listened exclusively to Frank Sinatra and “Number One Song In Heaven”, while other voices include Beck, Björk, Weird Al Jankovic and Duran Duran. The diversity of their celebrity admirers apparently came as a surprise even to Sparks themselves.

“There’s a lot of people in the film that Ron and Russell have never met, or big fans they didn’t know, and that I think is because being ahead of the curve for 50 years is kind of lonely place to be,” says Wright. “You’re out there on your own. When they were doing the Giorgio Moroder stuff on *Top Of The Pops*, they had no idea members of Duran Duran were dancing to them in Birmingham, or that Culture



Sparks' muse Christi Haydon with Ron and Russ, 1995

ERIC BLUM/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; GALUSCHKA/JUL STEINBILD VIA GETTY IMAGES



Home boys: in their Beverly Hills studio, April 21, 2004

Club and Spandau Ballet were dancing to it at the Blitz club.”

“We understood that we had some influence on British pop music,” says Russell. “But Edgar would call us and say, you know this week, I’m interviewing Neil Gaiman and Mike Myers and we were like ‘What?!’ We had no sense that there were these people outside of our sphere who were listening. To see Neil Gaiman on film speaking so eloquently and specifically about the details of the *Propaganda* album cover... The fact that Mike Myers knows ‘Girl From Germany’ and can recite the lyrics – those moments were really special for us.”

IN the most implausible development of all, the Sparks story looks set for an all-singing-and-dancing final act worthy of MGM with the opening of Leos Carax’s *Annette*, starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard this summer. The film was originally slated to open Cannes in 2020, before the festival was cancelled as the world entered lockdown. It must have seemed like a typically Sparksian moment of tragic-comedy: following the missed opportunities with Tati and Burton, after the years in the wilderness, after the hard work, the years of rehearsal and production, waiting for Adam Driver to return from his *Star Wars* commitments... to have their ultimate moment of triumph stolen away by a virus? Did it feel like a vast anti-Sparks cosmic conspiracy?

“Yeah, I have to say it did,” smiles Ron bashfully. “Because we really felt, that finally, you know, *all the stars are aligned*... And then, oh no, they’re not. But we’re really pleased the one film musical project that we have succeeded

in getting made is something that’s really uncompromising, in a similar way to our albums. We’re really fortunate that it didn’t get kind of watered down through any kind of Hollywood machinery. Carax actually had the stamina to stay with it for eight years.

“But also Adam Driver’s stamina, you know? He stuck with this project for four or five years now. He went off and did *Star Wars* and a lot of other projects and this could have been one of the things that just slipped away, as his career has gotten so huge. But he really was passionate about the project and stuck with it. Then Marion Cotillard as well!”

Wright certainly hadn’t planned for such a spectacularly final chapter to his film: “When I first had breakfast with Ron and Russ it was 2015. They told me in a kind of hedging-their-

bets way about working with Carax. You would, wouldn’t you? After what happened with Tati and Burton. But it turned out that being on set for *Annette* was the very last thing I shot.”

Against all the odds, have Sparks secured, if not their Hollywood, then their glorious enigmatic nouvelle vague ending?

“You hate to rationalise it,” admits Ron. “But we think everything has worked out well. This is the first Cannes after a two-year break and cinemas are now starting to open more and we’re planning a tour early next year. Obviously, it has been a pretty dismal time for everybody... but we think the energy of this period will work out in a really positive way.”

“WE HAD JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF SUCCESS”

RUSSELL MAEL

The Sparks Brothers is in selected cinemas from July 30



Bright Sparks: with Marion Cotillard; (inset above) director Leos Carax

SPARKS AT THE MOVIES

As youthful film students, the Mael Brothers always had ambitions to take their vision to the silver screen. But things rarely ran smoothly...



CONFUSION (JACQUES TATI, 1974)

Tati conceived the follow-up to *Playtime* as a satire on the society of the spectacle. Thanks to contacts at Island Records’ French office, Sparks – fresh from

their pop annus mirabilis – were lined up to play US technicians, visiting a rural French TV station to share their Yankee know-how. Sadly, Tati’s failing finances and health meant the film was never produced, although a would-be title song eventually surfacing on 1976’s *Big Beat* album.



ROLLERCOASTER (JAMES GOLDSTONE, 1977)

From the sublime to the ridiculous is a characteristic Sparks move. Ron and Russell described the collapse of the Tati collaboration as their greatest regret. They soon rued their appearance in this George

Segal/Richard Widmark disaster movie flop as their biggest mistake. Stepping in after the Bay City Rollers pulled out, their fleeting appearance finds Sparks at the height of their American Rock phase, performing “Big Boy” and “Fill ‘Er Up” with Ron moved to smash up his piano stool.



BAD MANNERS (BOBBY HOUSTON, 1984)

Worse was to come with 1984’s *Bad Manners*, a would-be gross-out teen cult comedy starring a youthful Pamela Adlon and a slumming Martin Mull. The soundtrack features a number of original Sparks

compositions, including the original instrumental title track “Growing Pains” – which is awesome in its generic ‘80s synth moves – and “Motorcycle Midget” (“He ain’t the leader of the pack/ Just a little snigger and he’ll trash your Cadillac”), but perhaps wisely, it was never given an official release.



MAI THE PSYCHIC GIRL (TIM BURTON, UNPRODUCED)

One of the first Japanese manga comics to be translated into English in the mid-’80s, *Mai* told the story of a 14-year-old girl with telekinetic powers on the

lam from shadowy government agencies – perfect material for a Sparks musical! The project kept the brothers occupied for six years until Tim Burton opted to make *The Nightmare Before Christmas* instead. Several tracks, including the zingy “That Looks Great On You” which suggest the Mael Bros meeting the Gershwin Bros circa *Funny Face*, have surfaced on YouTube.



ANNETTE (LEOS CARAX, 2021)

Having formed a mutual admiration society after Carax used “How Are You Getting Home?” in his unhinged 2012 fantasia *Holy Motors*, Sparks sent the French director a CD of

their new project, *Annette*, the story of a stand-up comedian who falls in love with an opera singer, which he agreed to direct as his first English-language movie. Set to open this year’s Cannes festival and then be available on Amazon, it could be an exquisite farrago or usher in a whole new era of Sparks musicals. At the very least it looks unmissable.

Album by album

Angélique Kidjo

The singer-songwriter's eclectic yet consistently Afrocentric musical path

THE way Angélique Kidjo tells it, most if not all of the world's music has its roots in Africa and her mission has been to join up the dots. "My whole life has been about building bridges between cultures and connecting the world with my African musical roots," she says. Born in Benin in 1960, she has spent most of her adult life living in Paris and New York, while her music has abseiled audaciously across genres without ever losing sight of her African heritage. She's won a Grammy for Best World Music Album four times – but to call her a world music artist would be a massive disservice. Never one to repeat herself, every release is a distinctive project with its own unique concept – from reimagining Talking Heads to an orchestral album with Philip Glass, collaborations with Tony Visconti and covers of Jimi Hendrix and Aretha Franklin. Yet she insists there is a unifying theme to her diversity. "It all leads back to where it started – in Africa!" **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

"My whole life has been about building bridges": Kidjo in 2021



LOGOZO

ISLAND, 1991

Kidjo's first release on a major label reached No 1 on the Billboard World Music albums chart and received rave reviews – not least from a certain James Brown...



I had left Benin and been living in Paris for seven or eight years when a friend sent my first self-produced album *Parakou* to Chris Blackwell at his home in Jamaica. The day after he got the record he faxed Island Records in London and told them, "You must sign this girl up at all costs and as quickly as possible." I've got a copy of the fax! The people from Island came to see me singing at the New Morning club in Paris. Chris offered me a contract and I said I had to have the artistic freedom to sing what I wanted. He told me that was understood. Once we'd written the songs for *LogoZO*, we needed a producer and Chris suggested Joe Galdo, who had worked with Gloria Estefan and Miami Sound Machine. Going to Miami to work with him was the first time I'd ever been to America. I told him the percussion is the foundation of a song for me and he got it because Cuban music is the same. We recorded the African

musicians in Paris where we finished the record. My plan was to mix my influences from African and American music and to challenge western attitudes towards Africa. The cover signifies what the record was about. The zebra-striped catsuit I'm wearing symbolised Africa – but like pop art we were using a cliché to subvert the stereotype. After the record came out I got a phone call from James Brown congratulating me on my music. I didn't believe it was him. Then suddenly he shouted, "Say it loud!" So I shouted back, "I'm black and proud!"

OREMI

ISLAND, 1998

Oremi means 'friends' in Yoruba and was the first in a trilogy of albums exploring the African roots of music across the black diaspora of the Americas.



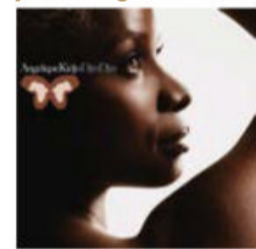
I wanted to recreate the lost link with the diaspora to show how Africa has contributed so much to contemporary culture. I kept coming back to how the music of slaves had crossed the world. I began to think of my next album as a trilogy in which I would collect music from each part

of the Americas – North America, South America and the Caribbean – and show how the music all had its roots in Africa. I also decided to leave Paris and move to New York. I wanted to meet other American artists and create a musical dialogue between them and Africa. I called Branford Marsalis and told him what I wanted to do and he invited me and my family to stay at his place, where we started working on *Oremi*. I wrote "Itche Koutche", an Afrobeat hymn, with Branford, who came up with the brass riff, while Casandra Wilson, Kelly Price and Kenny Kirkland were among the American musicians who sang or played on it. I wanted to record "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" as the album's opening track because Jimi Hendrix was proud of his African ancestry and he claimed it in that song – and who could better claim to be a voodoo child than me? I replaced Jimi's guitar riffs with Beninese chanting and we slowed down the tempo to make it more haunting. The second album in the trilogy, *Black Ivory Soul* [2002], took us to Brazil and the third album, *Oyaya!* [2004], to the Caribbean and Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Martinique and Cuba. All three records were about trying to get people to understand Africa differently.

DJINDJIN

RAZOR&TIE, 2007

Back to her roots, but with plenty of celebrity fellow travellers – from Carlos Santana to Ziggy Marley – plus Tony Visconti as producer



After exploring the music of the diaspora, my idea was to come back to my Beninese heritage and share the beauty of African music with artists from all corners of the world. The title refers to the sound of a bell – you hear it everywhere in Africa calling people together. We asked Tony Visconti to produce the record, not only because he had produced David Bowie but because he also recorded the Ghanaian band Osibisa in the 1970s, so I knew that he could capture the energy of African music in the studio. I asked Alicia Keys to sing on the album after she had joined me on stage at a concert in South Africa. Carlos Santana, Josh Groban and Peter Gabriel all contributed. Joss Stone, whom I met by chance when we were recording at Jimi Hendrix's Electric Lady studio in New York, was so young she'd never heard the original of "Gimme Shelter", but she sang on my version with a fire that would have made Mick Jagger proud. Ziggy Marley



Onstage in 2010, paying tribute to her father, "my musical foundation"



joined on "Sedjedo", on which we used a *gogbahou* rhythm from my village, which reflects the African roots that helped to create reggae. After four nominations, this was my first Grammy win. But when it was announced, the presenter mispronounced the title of the album. I thought, 'What the hell is that?' and it took me a few seconds to realise that I'd won. Afterwards, I balanced the award on my head for the photographers, just as African women do to carry their load. It was a tribute to the women of my continent who had inspired me – to their beauty, their resilience and their strength.

ÖYÖ

PROPER, 2010

After returning to Benin in 2008 for her father's funeral, Kidjo channelled his memory into an album that reflected the music he had introduced her to as a young girl...



The memory of my father's voice inspired me to record *Öyö*. In Yoruba, *Öyö* means beauty of the arts, beauty of the human spirit. My dad sang so beautifully and played the banjo, and I had always said one day we would record a duet together but we never did. I thought we would have more time. Before he passed away he told me, "After I'm gone, just call on me and I will be there. It's only my body that's leaving." He was my musical foundation and this album was a way to say goodbye to him by revisiting all the different kinds of music he brought into our home – both traditional African music and classic American soul of the 1960s and 1970s. He really opened our eyes to the music of Africa played by African descendants – James Brown's "Cold Sweat", Curtis Mayfield's "Move On Up", Aretha Franklin's "Baby I Love You" – all of those songs were playing in my head, along with Otis Redding's "I've Got Dreams To

Remember", which I used to try to sing as child before I could even speak English. Then when we did Santana's "Samba Pa Ti" with Roy Hargrove on trumpet, I could see my parents in the kitchen dancing to it and my father reaching for my mother and saying "Come on, let the food burn. This is our song." There are also two songs which were recorded by Miriam Makeba, who died the same year. She was always my role model. The last time I saw her, she said to me, "My daughter, I can go now because you're here."

EVE

429 RECORDS, 2014

Having made an album dedicated to her father's memory, Kidjo then made a record for her mother and all the women of Africa. Guests included Rostam Batmanglij, Dr John and the Kronos Quartet.

Another Grammy award followed... Eve is an album of remembrance of the spirit of the African women I grew up with and a testament to the pride and strength that hide behind the smile that masks everyday troubles. It's named after my mother, Yvonne, who sings with me on "Bana", a traditional Congolese song. She was born in Congo and she

"I kept coming back to how the music of slaves had crossed the world"

was 87 when we recorded that. She's still going strong at 94. There's so much resilience among African women – they just need empowering which is why I helped to set up the Batonga Foundation to support the education of young African girls. Earlier in my life, I'd thought about becoming a human rights lawyer – but music has been the best channel for me to help people because music has the power to lift people up. Travelling around Africa while making this album was inspiring. I was in Kenya on a UNICEF project and there were these women in their beautiful gowns. Suddenly they opened their mouths and started singing. It drew me in and I started singing along. We recorded them and that's "M'Baamba" the album opener. Then we got Dr John to play piano on "Kulumbu" with that New Orleans feel, the one place in America where the African tradition is deep down in the music. ➤

With her first Grammy, for *Djin Djin*, in L.A., Feb 10, 2008





"An unbelievable thrill": with David Byrne at Carnegie Hall, Feb 25, 2004



A Tribute To Celia Cruz at Prospect Park, Brooklyn, July 29, 2016

SINGS WITH THE ORCHESTRE PHILHARMONIQUE DU LUXEMBOURG

429 RECORDS, 2015

In 2012, Gast Waltzing – conductor of Luxembourg's Orchestre Philharmonique – suggested arranging Kidjo's songs in symphonic style. The success of this Grammy-winning album led Philip Glass to compose orchestral music for three poems written by Kidjo in Yoruba, which were premiered on stage with the Orchestre Philharmonique Du Luxembourg in 2014...



I started to appreciate classical music when I moved to France. One day, I heard Ravel's

"Bolero" and that was a revelation. I recognised African modes in it and the use of a hypnotic groove on which the themes are built. I told my fellow students, "This is African music!" but no one believed me. That was a great discovery, which reinforced my belief that music is a universal language, and that genres should not be taken so seriously. Recording with a 110-piece orchestra was fascinating. I had to project my voice in a different way. You have to become part of the orchestra. We did some songs of mine both old and new plus "Samba Pa Ti" and Sidney Bechet's "Petite Fleur". A classical orchestra has such a range that if you have the right conductor it is able to recreate the energy and the rhythm of African music. When I discovered Philip Glass's music I found it creates a kind of trance, like our traditional music in Benin. He's the most generous spirit, interested in the richness of world cultures. After the album came out we played it and the Yoruba songs Philip composed in concert in America with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.



UNCUT CLASSIC

REMAIN IN LIGHT

KRAVENWORKS, 2018

Reimagining an album that holds a canonical place in rock history is a bold endeavour – but Kidjo pulled it off brilliantly when she took Talking Heads' 1980 classic on a journey back to Africa.

When I arrived in Paris in 1983 and went to jazz school, I heard so much new music, but I remember "Once In A Lifetime" blowing me away. I think I must have heard it at a party or a friend's place. Somebody put it on and everybody started dancing. I'm like, "These musicians are African?" Somebody told me, "No, they are white Americans. It's rock'n'roll!" What struck me was the feel of it, because it was not straight rock or funk. Then I found out that David Byrne and Brian Eno had been listening to African music while they were making *Remain In Light* and it all made sense. David came to see me singing at SOB's club in New York and we started talking music and I found he knew all about Fela Kuti and King Sunny Adé. I listened to the Talking Heads album and every song was based on repetitive patterns that reminded me of the trance you feel when you listen to traditional music in Benin. I knew I had to do my version of it. I tried to keep the innovative spirit of the original but to bring it back to Africa where it all started. The foundation of that original Talking Heads album is Tina Weymouth. Her basslines are driving everything, like the drums in African music. My idea was to make the grooves even more distinctively African – the

Afrobeat that I was feeling in the song when I was dancing to Talking Heads all those years ago. There are Beninese percussion loops and I added some African proverbs, like hidden messages, in response to the lyrics on the original album. On "The Overload", for example, the backing vocals are singing "Don't forget the legacy of our ancestors" in Yoruba. We got

in Tony Allen, who was Fela's original drummer. We got Ezra Koenig from Vampire Weekend and the horn section of Antibalas, who are a New York-based Afrobeat band. Jeff Bhasker, who has worked with Kanye West and Jay-Z and Beyoncé, produced. Playing it live was great, too. To perform "Once in A Lifetime" at Carnegie Hall and have David Byrne join me on stage was an unbelievable thrill.

CELIA

DECCA, 2019

Kidjo won another Grammy for her tribute album to the late Celia Cruz, the unrivalled 'Queen of Salsa'...



Salsa is huge in Africa and the reason is Celia Cruz. When I first heard her sing, it just struck a chord.

I heard Africa in my gut. She came to Benin when I was 14 or 15 – I saw the poster and had to go. My mouth was hanging open. It was the first time I saw a powerful woman on stage. Her costume, the way she moved... I was like, "Women can do that? There's nothing I can't do then." Growing up in Africa, that was a game changer for me. Later I met her in Paris. She looked at me and said, "Oh, my African sister!" Then she invited me on stage. So I sang in my broken Spanish and she was like, "This girl is afraid of nothing." I wanted to say, "You're not afraid of anything, so why should I be?" I did a tribute concert to her in Brooklyn

and Philip Glass was at the show and said, "Why don't you do an album?" Africa is there all the way in Celia's music and our way to pay her tribute was to take her back to Africa. I made the rhythms more bare and used a band from Benin for percussion and horns. There's no one can beat Celia and no-one can play Cuban music better than Cuban musicians, so there's no point in trying to replicate that. Instead, the key was to

bring out the core of African music that has always been part of salsa. My only regret is that I should've done it when she was still alive.

MOTHER NATURE

UNIVERSAL, 2021

At the 2020 Grammys, where she picked up the fourth award for Celia, Kidjo dedicated her award to a generation of new African artists, including fellow nominee Nigeria's Burna Boy. A year on, many of them are showcased on her latest album...



I sang on Burna Boy's album *African Giant* and there's something so infectious about his grooves that

I wanted him on this record. The song is called "Do Yourself" and it's saying that if we don't fix our continent, no-one's going to fix it for us. There are so many fearless young talents from all over Africa. They're vibrant and hungry and I wanted to give a platform to as many of them as I could. Yemi Alade is Nigerian and I sang on her album *Woman Of Steel*. Sampa The Great is Zambian. Shungudzo is Zimbabwean. Mr Eazi is another Nigerian singer and songwriter. His song on the album, "Africa, One Of A Kind", started with a sample from Salif Keita's "Africa", so I thought we'd ask Salif to sing on it as well. One of the most important things about this record is that it's dedicated to Mother Earth, so its carbon footprint had to be minimal and its recording didn't involve any travel. As it was recorded during the pandemic we couldn't travel anyway – I was in France and the others were recording in Lagos, Benin, Lusaka, London and Los Angeles. All over. But even though we weren't in the same room there's a shared urgency because we were all in the same predicament. It's a reminder that if we want to get back to some normalcy we need everyone to sing and dance. 🌍

Mother Nature is out on June 18

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“Everything stretched out... it expanded!”

DEAD FREAKS UNITE! 1971 was a momentous year for the **GRATEFUL DEAD** – involving landmark shows, bizarre ESP experiments, French Acid Tests, hypnosis, new faces and emotional farewells. **BOB WEIR, BILL KREUTZMANN** and other eyewitnesses share tales from this momentous journey with Rob Hughes: “We were just coming alive.”

Photo by BOB MARKS

Jerry Garcia at
Berkeley
Community
Theatre - August
14, 1971

THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Fatal attraction:
the Dead live at
Fillmore East,
April 27, 1971

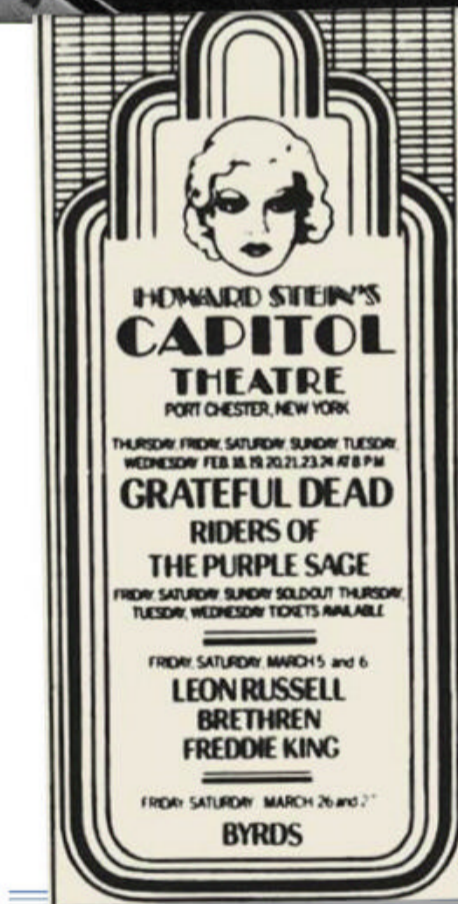


THE Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, some 30 miles north of NYC, began life as a pre-war cinema and vaudeville venue. By 1970, however, rock promoter Howard Stein had transformed it into a psychedelic pleasure palace. Traffic, Santana, Frank Zappa and Janis Joplin were among those who performed there that year – Joplin even premiered “Mercedes Benz”, written just hours earlier in a Port Chester bar – but its most regular attraction was the Grateful Dead.

The Dead found the Capitol crowd a little more attentive than at the Fillmore East, their other regular haunt on the East Coast. It was a place to stretch out, try different things, introduce new songs. The perfect venue, then, for a run of shows in February 1971 that heralded the next phase in their evolution.

“It was an incredibly creative time for the band,” recalls singer and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir. “We had the feeling that we’d basically opened up the bag and there was a lot more in there. We spent so much time with one another in those days, either on the road or at home, that we *really* learned how to play together. It all merged, at that point.”

On opening night – February 18 – the Dead chose to unpack a batch of remarkable new tunes: “Bertha”, “Wharf Rat”, “Loser”, “Playing In The Band” and “Greatest Story Ever Told”. Songs that became embedded in their live canon for years to come, shining illustrations of the band’s telepathic interplay, poised between limber melody and free improv.



**“IT WAS AN
INCREDIBLY
CREATIVE
TIME FOR
THE BAND”**

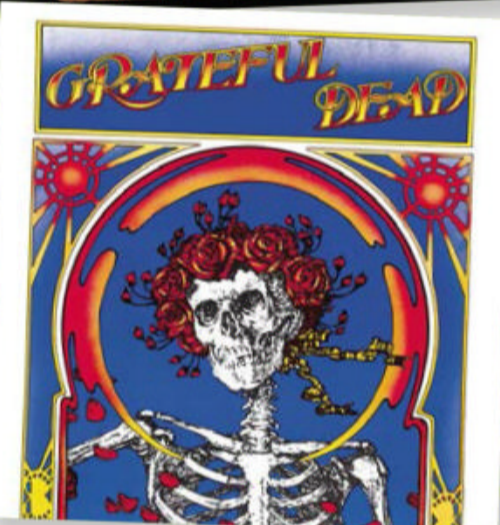
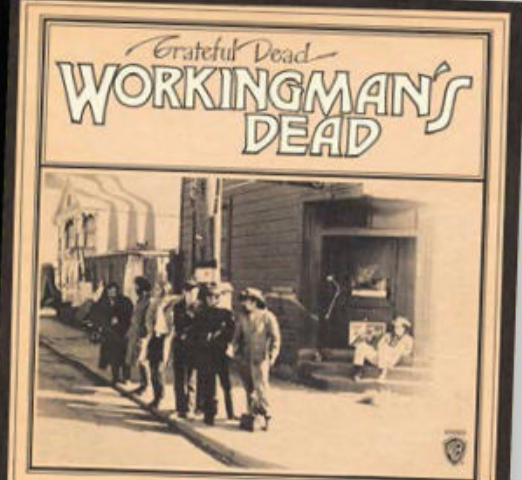
BOB WEIR

Drummer Bill Kreutzmann remembers it as an exceptional period. “We were just really starting to become a band and those were really high moments,” he says. “We were just coming alive. All I could think about in those days was playing and getting to the show.”

In what turned out to be a profoundly transitional year that saw the temporary exit of founder member Ron “Pigpen” McKernan and Kreutzmann’s fellow drummer Mickey Hart, the band underwent a metamorphosis that involved landmark shows, bizarre ESP experiments, French Acid Tests, new faces and teary goodbyes. This shift was captured on double LP *Grateful Dead* (aka ‘Skull & Roses’ owing to its distinctive cover art by Alton Kelly and Stanley Mouse), the extraordinary live document of ’71, released that October. It’s the sound of a band pushing beyond themselves. Aside from its unique pyretic energy, the album illustrates the sheer diversity of the Dead: blues, country, psych, rock’n’roll, experimental jams.

“The band were better suited to the live environment than the studio,” says their trusted engineer Betty Cantor-Jackson, who co-produced ‘Skull & Roses’ with longtime cohort Bob Matthews. “Everything stretched out, it expanded. The music grew and grooved. It was amazing to be inside of that when it was happening.”

Crucially, too, the album expanded their reach. Until then viewed as a cult band who’d enjoyed a modest degree of success with their last two studio albums, *Workingman’s Dead* and *American Beauty*, ‘Skull & Roses’ was their first gold-seller in American. The fan club callout on the album sleeve – “DEAD FREAKS UNITE: Who are you? Where are you? How are you?” – further galvanised a growing community of Deadheads that swelled to five figures over the next few years.



"In '71 you're looking at a hippie family turning into something else," suggests pianist/organist Ned Lagin, a touring member of the Dead who also played on *American Beauty*. "They became far tougher and more lucrative. 'Skull & Roses' came out within that context of them being an entertainment/touring band rather than a counterculture art band. When I first saw the Dead in Boston two years earlier, they came out on stage an hour late, sat on their amps and tried to figure out what to do. By the fall of 1971 they'd filtered all of that out."

THE Grateful Dead had hardly stopped. From 1969–1970 they'd begun to harden into faithful road warriors, racking up nearly 300 shows across the States and Canada, establishing strongholds in New York and, naturally, their San Francisco hometown. The band themselves had long since left Haight-Ashbury behind, setting up home at various spots in rural Marin County in the summer of 1968. The countercultural spirit was

still in the air, though, come the early '70s.

"The interesting thing about '71 is that it's actually the summary year of what happened in the '60s," observes Lagin. "You had this community of musicians who had their own identities, but were also cross-pollinating with one another, jamming with one another, hanging out, sharing music. There was a scene around Mickey Hart's ranch that involved people from Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Crosby, Stills & Nash and the Grateful Dead."

This fraternal tenor heightened the Dead's creativity. Fresh from his involvement with newly formed country rockers New Riders Of The Purple Sage, Jerry Garcia had enough songs to start planning a solo album. Weir, Hart, Kreutzmann and Pigpen also hatched ideas for separate projects. "Crosby, Stills & Nash had moved up to the Bay Area and settled up here, so we were hanging out," explains Weir. "At that particular time we settled into the craft of songwriting, gleaned from them, I guess. We got more focused on how you go about that. Jerry was writing a lot and I started writing for real."

Eager to return to a live setting, the Dead set about booking the Port Chester gigs. After the relatively straight cut of *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*, interrogating structure and form was very much back on the agenda. Pigpen led the band through an epic version of Otis Redding's "Hard To Handle"; "Dark Star" segued into "Wharf Rat", mutating into the impromptu wonder of "Beautiful Jam". The traditional "Goin' Down The Road Feeling Bad" was bookended by driving runs at Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away".

The Dead sounded inspired. "I was in one of the rooms off the balcony, with my 16-track machine," remembers Cantor-Jackson. "When they played 'Sugar Magnolia', that balcony rocked so much, with so many people dancing, that it threw me up in the air like a top. The machine actually left the floor, too. It was like, 'Holy crap! I'd never in my life experienced anything like that before.'"

The investigative nature of those six shows at the Capitol Theatre wasn't confined to the music alone. The Dead had organised nightly ESP experiments with Dr Stanley Krippner of the Maimonides

INSIDE THE DEAD VAULT

NO other group has been collated quite like the Dead, largely thanks to the efforts of a fiercely devoted community of Deadheads who've been trading live tapes and bootlegs since the late '60s. The band's decision to record most of their shows, employing influential fans as curators, has been a smart move too, resulting in live recordings series like *Dick's Picks*, *Road Trips* and *Dave's Picks*.

The 'Dave' in question is the Dead's legacy manager and audio-visual archivist, David Lemieux. He has the enviable job of overseeing the band's entire tape stash, housed in a climate-controlled facility within a larger Warner Music Group building in greater L.A. "The Dead did a little over 2,300 concerts, and 75 per cent or more of those were recorded," he explains. "There are certain gaps in the early years, but from 1971–'95 virtually every single Grateful Dead performance was recorded, with a few exceptions. Close to 1,800 shows, in very good quality, reside in the Dead vault."

This means that the chances of finding any new stuff are slight. The last significant batch of unheard material appeared on 2019's *Ready Or Not*, a live compilation of songs that the band had been working up for a new studio album between 1992 and 1995. Jerry Garcia's death in August '95 meant that it was never completed. Lemieux reveals he's sitting on three unreleased Phil Lesh songs from the same era, though "Phil has requested we hold off on those for a bit". The main task for archivists, therefore, is ensuring the Dead's catalogue is impeccably maintained.

"Our philosophy in releasing Grateful Dead music has always been to put out the shows that represent their best performances and enhance the legacy," says Lemieux, who's been working for the Dead for 22 years. "Our mandate isn't to put out mediocre things to fill people's collections; it's to get the best Dead music out there."

This in itself throws up a conundrum: how to sift and choose when the quality level is so high. "The biggest problem with the Grateful Dead is

the sheer vastness," agrees Rhino Entertainment president Mark Pinkus, the man in charge of the band's catalogue. "Almost all of the recordings are extraordinary. Part of it is catering to the seven or eight unique eras the Dead had over their career."

Lemieux cites the recovery of four distinct collections of live tapes into the vault over the years. Two stashes dated from the spring, summer and early autumn of 1971 – the 'Skull & Roses' era. Another came from the family of a Grateful Dead crew member, who'd left a box of tapes from 1969–'70 in the garage, while 400 reels of tape from the latter half of the '70s turned up around four years ago. The holy grail was a pristine recording of a much-bootlegged fan favourite from New York's Cornell University in 1977 (officially released in 2017 as *Cornell 5/8/77*).

As for the few holes in the archive, Lemieux is particularly keen to gather tapes from the second half of 1970 and January/February '79, if they exist at all. "We've gone through the tapes pretty diligently, but there are still some sessions from *Mars Hotel* and *Blues For Allah* that we haven't looked at yet. I think there are things to put out that people will be surprised at."

After the release of a contemporaneous live show from 1971 to go with the latest reissue of 'Skull & Roses', what's next? Both Lemieux and Pinkus are understandably tight-lipped, but the latter reveals that "it's safe to assume there's a boxset announcement for 2021 coming soon". And with

the 50th anniversary of *Europe '72* coming up, they're discussing new ways to mark the occasion. No mean feat, considering the label has already released all 22 shows of that Dead tour on 2011's mammoth boxset *Europe '72: The Complete Recordings*.

"There are still new and exciting ways to present that music," insists Lemieux. "It's such a momentous occasion in the Grateful Dead world, so we've been looking at creative ways to get people engaged with that tour again, to make it more accessible in a format we think people are really going to want."



David Lemieux and Mark Pinkus



THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Medical Centre in Brooklyn. As head of dream research, Krippner wanted to test whether a crowd of 2,000 fans, many of whom were psychedelically enhanced, could transmit specific thoughts to a chosen recipient. Deadheads were thus shown images projected onto a large screen above the stage, then asked to “send” a picture to the sleeping psychic back at the lab.

“It actually worked pretty well,” attests Kreutzmann, who, along with other bandmates, continued the relationship with Krippner. “Later on, he hypnotised Mickey Hart and myself so we’d be able to play in ways he suggested. I really got into that stuff. Krippner would say something like ‘fire’, and we’d play like that. I remember looking over when he was talking to us one time and there was this colony of ants crawling out of his shirt pocket. He was a very far-out man.”

Weir sees the Krippner trials as emblematic of the Dead’s synchronous musical relationship. “There’s a telepathic link that happens between any group of musicians that are playing together,” he says. “We first became aware of that in the ’60s, during the Acid Tests. We were able to plumb each other’s minds. By ’71 we were playing pretty much every day and listening to the same stuff, communally – Joseph Spence, Robert Johnson, gospel groups like the Swan Silvertones, all kinds of jazz and blues. We’d borrow heavily from any number of different sources. John Coltrane never went away, we were always dipping back into that stuff.”

THE Port Chester shows didn’t pass without incident. In what became the Dead’s first major drama of 1971, Mickey Hart quit after the first night. Still burdened by the behaviour of his father Lenny – the Dead’s ex-manager who’d disappeared with a huge chunk of their profits the previous year – Hart’s playing had suffered as a result, exacerbated by heavy drug abuse. The decision to leave was mutual.

With Kreutzmann as sole percussionist, the Dead were back to how they’d started in the mid-’60s: as a five-piece. If anything, their playing improved. “Mickey is one hell of a drummer, but Billy had a way of playing where the most important statements were the beats that he *didn’t* play,” says Bob Matthews. “That was his real secret. So even though the band went from six to five for a while, they got better again. They got tighter.”

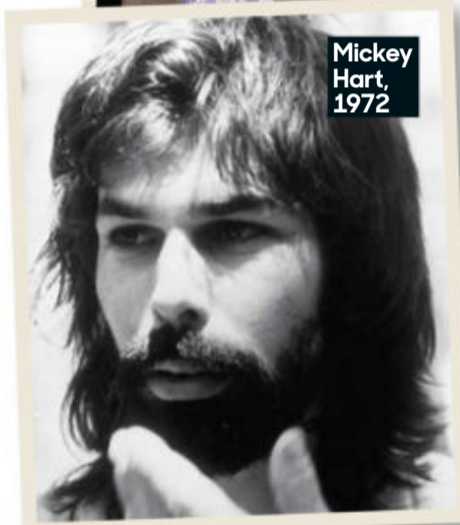
Certainly, the band’s return to the East Coast in April – after a swing around San Francisco and dates in the Midwest – found them in scintillating form. That spring was crowned by six consecutive nights at the Fillmore East, where their stage guests included Duane Allman and, somewhat improbably, The Beach Boys. “Every show was



Weir live, August 1971



Dr Stanley Krippner, 2008



Mickey Hart, 1972



Janis Joplin, 1969

unique because the band would go off in different directions each night,” says Matthews. “The people responded to it. That was the key to a Grateful Dead performance. Even on the worst night they were the best band in the world.”

Making use of a hole in the schedule in late June, at the request of French fashion designer Jean Bouquin, the band flew to Paris for a festival. The event was ultimately rained off, leaving them and the extended Dead family kicking their heels in the grand surrounds of their base, the Château d’Hérouville. The only sensible thing was to throw a party.

The Dead set up their gear on the vast back lawn, near the pool, inviting along the locals (including the police chief, mayor and fire department) for the evening. Candles were lit, acid passed around. The band played for three hours. It was, as bassist Phil Lesh put it, “a piece of San Francisco transplanted into the heart of France”.

“We had our Alembic PA system out there at the Château,” recalls Cantor-Jackson. “It was a beautiful setting and so much fun. I may have done a small amount of acid – nothing super psychedelic – but I think some of the French people wanted to do it.”

The night ended with almost everyone in the pool. Says Weir: “Some of the guys in the crew brought LSD and a lot of the folks partook. I guess they might have spiked the punch as well. A lot of townspeople came to that little gathering, maybe out of curiosity, but they really got into it. We had a high old evening.”

Back home, the Dead continued to break symbolic ties with their past. San Francisco’s Fillmore West, the band’s primary seat of operations in their early days, when it was known as the Carousel Ballroom, closed its doors on July 4. The Dead played for the final time there two days earlier. “The Carousel had been a great little clubhouse for us,” Weir says. “It was right there, so we’d come and play what we’d just worked up in rehearsal.”

A good portion of their final set at the Fillmore West fills the bonus disc for the 50th-anniversary reissue of ‘Skull & Roses’. A highlight is a 17-minute trip through The Young Rascals’ “Good Lovin’”, a customary vehicle for Pigpen’s spontaneous interactions with the crowd. “Pigpen gave the most incredible performance that night,” says Kreutzmann. “I remember him getting wild, talking to the audience and getting all this shit back from them. They loved it. Pigpen was the leader of the band when we first started, the head guy. He held the whole group together.”

By 1971, Pigpen’s chronic alcoholism, allied to an unrelated autoimmune disease of the liver, had gradually diminished his role in the band. He left the band a month after the Fillmore show. “Pigpen was smart and intuitive,” notes Lakin. “But in ’71 his activities were waning and he was hospitalised. The death of Janis Joplin was weighing on him, too. She’d been another part of the early Dead entourage, with Big Brother & The Holding Company.”

The Dead decided against pressing on as a four-piece. After



Former “headguy” Pigpen in 1971

BOB MARKS: GARY GERSHOFF/WIREIMAGE; GINNY WINN/MICHAEL LOCHS/ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES



Dream team:
the Dead with
Keith Godchaux
(centre), 1972

taking a short break from the road, they auditioned pianist Keith Godchaux in late September. He and his wife, singer Donna Jean Godchaux, regulars around Bay Area clubland, had introduced themselves after a recent show. “Garcia called me and said: ‘Get over to the studio right now. You’ve gotta hear this guy!’” says Kreutzmann. “So I go down and get behind my drums. No matter what we played – we never told him the keys – Keith was all over it. Jerry asked my opinion after and I said, ‘God, he’s wonderful. He’s hired!’”

With his intuitive feel and predisposition for rock’n’roll, Godchaux brought another dimension to the Dead. He made his live bow at the Northrop Auditorium in Minneapolis that October, where the band chose to unveil another fresh round of enduring tunes, among them “Mexicali Blues”, “Ramble On Rose”, “Jack Straw” and “Tennessee Jed”. As Lakin says: “By the time Keith entered in the fall of ’71, they were a different band than they had been in February.”

Pigpen returned to the stage in December, but only temporarily. By the following summer he was out of the band completely – he died in March ’73 – with both Keith and Donna Jean Godchaux now established as full-time members.

‘SKULL & Roses’ was compiled from shows at the Fillmore East and New York’s Manhattan Centre in April ’71, plus San Francisco’s Winterland a month earlier. Just as “Bertha” and “Wharf Rat” implied a new peak for Garcia’s collaborations with lyricist Robert Hunter, Weir excelled on the majestic “Playing In The Band”, developed from a jam (“The Main Ten”) and a riff gifted to him by David Crosby. Another gem, “Greatest Story Ever Told”, didn’t make the final cut, although one whole side of vinyl was taken up with the exploratory Weir/Kreutzmann favourite “The Other One”.

“Weir was really developing his own strengths as a songwriter in ’71,” says Lakin. “Technically, too, he became far more proficient on his guitar. As a Garcia-jamming accompanist, he got a lot stronger that year. It was reciprocal, because Garcia worked on Weir to provide the context, just as he did with Phil Lesh. It was chemistry, intuition, brotherhood – all psychically and musically constructive.”

Looking back 50 years later, Weir says: “I was a kid,

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Bob Weir goes classical

ASIDE from touring America later this year with Dead & Company – the Grateful Dead offshoot that includes Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart – Bob Weir tells *Uncut* that he’s also readying a special, long-in-the-works project. “It’s a concerto grosso in classical terms,” he says. “This will be a live performance. I’ve been working on this for the last 10 years or so. We’re booked early next spring with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC and it’s going to take four nights to play the whole thing. There’s a possibility we may record it before we even get there. Structure-wise, we’ve fully orchestrated over 20 songs and there’ll be sections where we’re going to try to get the symphony orchestra to improvise. The other thing that’s new is that once we’ve played what we’ve got at the Kennedy Centre in DC, we’re never going to assemble the songs in the same order again. It’ll be pretty much like a Dead concert in that respect, as we’ve got enough songs orchestrated to make it an endless project. So each time we put them together they’ll be different, on account of the improv sections and the order. The idea is that one song will lead to a different one the next time around, and so on. We’re kind of following the rules the Grateful Dead established.”



wide open, and hearing stuff that I’m not sure I would hear now. Sometimes I listen to those recordings, when my young hands were able to do stuff that these ancient hands now find a little challenging and I realise that I had more reach. But it’s a give-and-take situation. Now I have a pretty intuitive feel for what notes work together, whereas back then I didn’t. So I was more apt to try just about anything.”

For Kreutzmann, ‘Skull & Roses’ is “a really honest statement of how we sounded way back then”. And one that continues to exert a peculiar pull for the drummer. “Last month I had a celebration for my 75th birthday, out here on my little Kauai island, and Carlos Santana came over to play,” he explains. “The song he requested was ‘The Other One’. Here I was, sitting with my back to the ocean, with tons of people stretching back directly in front of us. It really reminded me of that classic photograph of Jerry and I playing with the Dead on Haight Street, with people all the way down the street for blocks and blocks. It was magical.”

The events of 1971 still resonate with Weir too. The ESP experience, for one, left a lasting impression. He’s about to get involved with a group of people that Phish’s Michael Gordon is assembling “to pick up where that experiment left off. If I can find time I’m going to get involved in that little foray into the uncharted. It’s real interesting.”

Aside from capturing their shifting dynamic and mindset, ‘Skull & Roses’ proved to be the Dead’s gateway album. Its larger commercial success opened a route through the rest of the decade. The spring of 1972 would see them undertake their first substantial tour of Europe, memorialised on another major seller, *Europe ’72*. Within a year the newly solvent band were filling arenas back home and, in a bid for greater autonomy, breaking free from Warners and setting up their own label.

None of it could’ve happened without ‘Skull & Roses,’” reflects Weir. “Our first records hadn’t done all that much, but that one really let us know we had a market. We realised we could make a living because enough people could relate to what we were doing. It was affirmation.”

Skull & Roses: Expanded Edition is out July 25 on Rhino

L I V E

SONGLINES ENCOUNTERS FESTIVAL

May 20–22, Kings Place, London

After 14 months without live music, this vivid multicultural celebration restores a sense of joy and hope

OPENING its doors just days after the lifting of lockdown restrictions on indoor concerts, the Songlines

Encounters Festival is a masterclass in resourceful adaptation to a cautious new post-Covid climate. In theory, a globally focused “world music” event might sound like a major logistical nightmare under ongoing international travel constraints. But the Songlines team hit upon the inspired notion of a homegrown bill celebrating multicultural London, refreshing last year’s postponed lineup with a selection of UK-based bands led by exiles and emigres. Necessity is the mother of reinvention.

Attending a cluster of indoor shows for the first time in almost 18 months certainly has a disquieting, electric thrill. Even with a limited-capacity audience spaced out in socially distant seats, Songlines Encounters manages to trigger a

SIMON BROUGHTON



Elaha Soroor: proudly rebellious

flood of sense-memory, a reminder of the sheer physical pleasure of feeling the wallop of drum and bass, twang and clatter in an enclosed venue. This is a primal effect no online gig can reproduce, a feast for Covid-starved senses.

An early festival highlight is the Anglo-Moroccan sextet **Electric Jalaba**, whose globalised fusion sound applies modern rock and electronic shading to the gnawa traditions of North and West Africa, an ancient repertoire of Islamic spiritual songs typically performed at communal late-night celebrations. The backbone of the band is formed

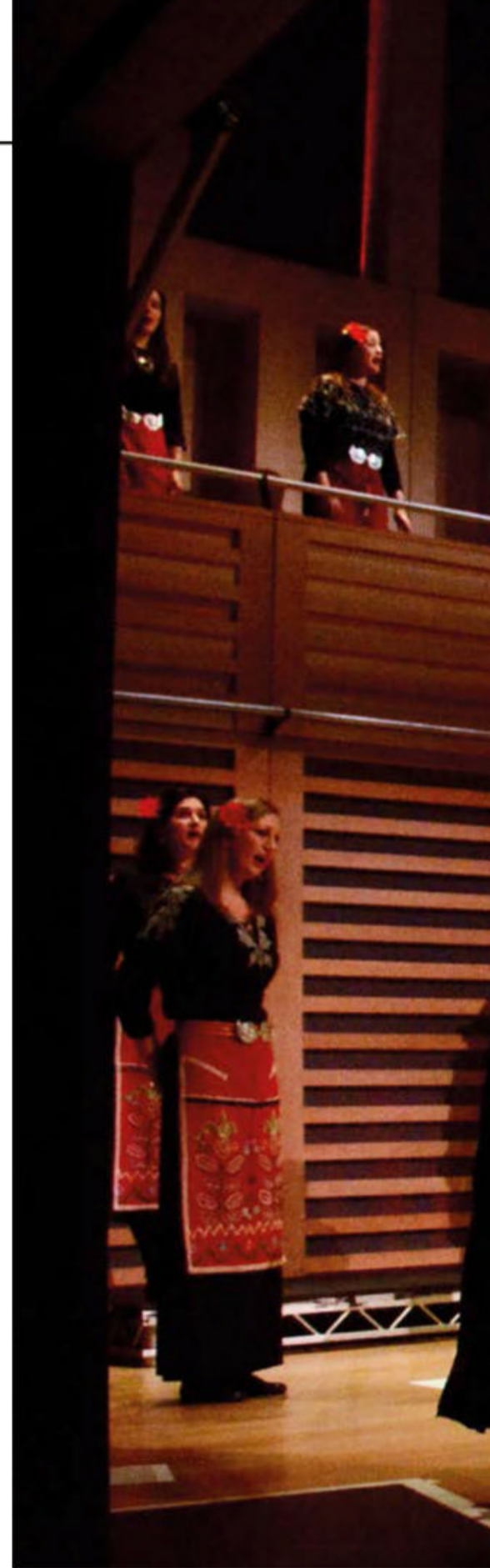
by the four Keen brothers from Dorset, but the focus on stage is their livewire Moroccan vocalist Simo Lagnawi, who wears a colourful patchwork suit and possesses a booming, grainy voice. Over a trance-like backdrop that nods to Afrobeat, krautrock, techno and reggae, Lagnawi leads the group through cyclical Arabic chants while plucking at his garishly decorated gimbri, a kind of three-stringed lute with a warm, rasping timbre. It’s quite the spectacle, musical virtuosity meets carnival showmanship.

“This is not the usual context for this music,” jokes keyboard player Henry Keen apologetically, inviting the audience to dance on their chairs. But even the slightly sterile, regimented setting of Kings Place cannot dampen kinetic bangers like “Cubaili Ba”, a polyrhythmic melange of electronics, programmed beats and multi-instrumental textures. “Agia Hausa” is a more ruminative interlude, wafted along by sinewy grooves and softly brushed guitar twangs, while the rousing finale “Hindewu” features several Keen brothers blowing across bottle tops, a charmingly lo-fi touch that pays playful homage to Herbie Hancock’s jazz-funk standard “Watermelon Man”. By the end, a few hardy souls are dancing,

and not even in their chairs.

Based around the core duo of Italian guitarist Giuliano Modarelli and British keyboard player Al MacSween, **Kefaya** are a fluid collective who draw musical inspiration from multiple sources, but especially the Middle East. Their Songlines set features their current collaborator, the glamorous Afghan singer **Elaha Soroor**, who balances powerful emotions with great technical control. Backing into the limelight with a mix of modesty and mischief, Soroor makes her melismatic yodels, tricky tempo changes and vertiginous high notes look disarmingly effortless.

Their performance feels warm and mellow at first, but there is a darker political subtext behind Soroor’s lyrics – in Farsi and Dari – about love, longing and lost homelands. Kefaya named themselves after a revolutionary slogan popularised during the Arab Spring, while their



Electric Jalaba: fusing rock and African gnawa traditions



exiled singer, as the winner of a TV talent show in Afghanistan, has made herself a potential target for violently misogynist forces like the Taliban. Indeed, even Soroor's stage name is a pseudonym to shield her family from possible repercussions back home. It translates as "goddess of happiness", a gloriously defiant statement in itself.

Sooroor peppers the set with subtle criticisms about the poison of patriarchal power, sweetly mouthing "fuck off" in silent protest as she introduces the bouncy, deceptively cheery "Charsi". Traditional folk ballads like "Gole Be Khar", which begins with some gorgeous acoustic guitar fretwork before swelling into a full-blooded blowout, are proudly rebellious celebrations of forbidden female desire. The singer also flags up the genocide of her native Hazara people, an ethnic minority who have been brutalised in Afghanistan and Pakistan for over a century.

When Soroor exits the stage at various points to make way for Kefaya's wordless jams and extended solos, energy levels sag a little. Thankfully, she returns for the lusty finale, a whooping rave-up celebration of wine, sensuality and friendship. In a world dominated by reactionary puritans, few things are more political than pleasure. Living well is the best revenge.

Owing to the heightened coronavirus threat posed by indoor singing, choral music has been more restricted than most during lockdown, and remains tightly controlled even now. Which lends extra emotional resonance to the

The London Bulgarian Choir's arrival at Kings Place for their first indoor show in 14 months, with 26 multinational members carefully spaced out across the stage and balcony above. LBC founder and

frontwoman Dessislava Stefanova brings a very Balkan humour to these voluptuously blended harmonies, diaphonic chants and ululating quarter-tones. Between songs, she explains the tragicomic

folklore behind wry lyrics about sex-starved pensioners, bawdy villagers and accidental human sacrifices.

Before relocating to London two decades ago, Stefanova served as concert-master to the legendary State

The massed voices work like a soul-soothing balm

TV choir founded by Philip Koutev in Soviet-era Bulgaria. It was Koutev's recordings in the '70s and '80s that spawned the album series *Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares*, elevating these artfully reimagined folk classics into a global franchise. Indeed, some of this set draws on that first game-changing anthology, reissued by 4AD in 1986, notably the luscious vocal cascades of "Kalimankou Denkou" and the gossipy birdsong chatter of "Pilentze Pee".

More than anything else at Songlines Encounters, the LBC's massed human voices work like a soul-soothing balm, a return to music as unifying social ritual. Hearing these gushing, gorgeous, timeless songs performed live feels like meeting old friends again after too long apart. "Soon we will be all together in Wembley Stadium," grins Stefanova as the final notes ripple and fade, hanging in the air like perfume. **STEPHENDALTON**

PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR



Sign when you're winning: Rhys reprises his *Resist Phony Encores!* show

GRUFF RHYS

Chalk, Brighton, May 22

One-man multimedia show proves the perfect format for the new abnormal

IT'S strange, but not so unsettling as to distract from our common, convivial purpose. Since this is early days in the reopening of live venues, socially distanced seating, table service and a one-way traffic system are the unusual order of things – which, as it turns out, fits Gruff Rhys' show like a (disposable latex) glove.

The shapeshifting singer-songwriter is performing his autobiographical *Resist Phony Encores!* show, which he debuted in 2018. Wry, slightly surreal and at times laugh-out-loud funny, it employs slides, cue cards ('Applause!' 'Louder!') and gnomic signs ('Ringfence Buffoonery!'), as well as acoustic songs in a loose charting of his career.

Dressed head-to-toe in black, he settles on a stool at his keyboard/loop-station and, after a brief explanation of the show, picks up his guitar and launches into the Welsh-language "Valium". Released in 1988 with his first band Ffa Coffi Pawb, it's a naive charmer with simple chord changes, prompting an anecdote about the singer's time in a bedsit in Bangor, the death from a barbiturates overdose of writer/painter Brenda Chamberlain in the same building, and the hazards of unravelling a jumper with a high-speed drill. This sets the evening's tone:

intimate, comedic and warmly scrambled, with low-stakes politics.

He then skips forward 30 years to "Pang!", which although stripped down and unplugged is still a beguiling pop twangle with faint bossa overtones. A digression about the awkwardness of addressing audiences follows, before the galloping "wild west sort of song" that is "Iolo". Then there's a hesitant start to "Y Teimlad", covered by Super Furry Animals, in which guitar strings pop and squeak. Before the sweetly hypnotic "Gwn Mi Wn", with its electronic drone and intermittent piercing whistles, there's a namecheck for Juana Molina, whose vocal-looping practice set Rhys on a new musical path. Meanwhile, Vonda Shepard gets both a dedication and a droll pasting ahead of gently pitching ballad "If We Were Words (We Would Rhyme)".

Wry, slightly surreal and at times laugh-out-loud funny

SETLIST

- 1 Valium
- 2 Pang!
- 3 Iolo
- 4 Y Teimlad
- 5 Gwn Mi Wn
- 6 If We Were Words (We Would Rhyme)
- 7 Loan Your Loneliness
- 8 Mausoleum Of My Former Self
- 9 Seeking New Gods
- 10 Hiking In Lightning
- 11 Colonise The Moon
- 12 Lonesome Words
- 13 Same Old Song
- 14 Candyllion/In A House With No Mirrors

There are four songs from newly released album *Seeking New Gods*. First is "Loan Your Loneliness", for which Rhys switches from guitar to keyboard and doubles up his vocal on the chorus ("loan me your unholy, lowly loneliness") in a move that's pure Beach Boys. It's back to the guitar for the countrified strum and vocal murmuring of "Mausoleum Of My Former Self", while the lilting title track comes on a little like a latter-day Kurt Wagner.

Filling out the last quarter of the set are musings on sharing a stage with big stars, plus notes on buffoonery's rightful place ("in pop entertainment only") and sax solos. The latter gives Rhys an excuse to flash up the slogan "Brexit is a bad sax solo" as he launches into SFA's "Colonise The Moon", whose gorgeous, folk-ish tune, with organ drone and fingerpicking, belies its despairing lyrics. Mixing the lullaby-ish "Candyllion" single with a song from Rhys' rather testing collaboration with Brazilian musician and peacenik Tony Da Gattora is a bold move, though both survive the experience. "In a house with no mirrors you'll never get old", runs the lyric – although for Rhys, whose show is built on self-reflection of a particular kind, the risk seems negligible. **SHARON O'CONNELL**





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- THU 05 BOURNEMOUTH O2 ACADEMY
- FRI 06 PLYMOUTH PAVILIONS
- MON 09 EDINBURGH CORN EXCHANGE
- TUE 10 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
- WED 11 NEWCASTLE O2 CITY HALL
- THU 12 LEEDS O2 ACADEMY
- SAT 14 NORTHAMPTON DERNGATE
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- MON 16 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
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- 13 Inverness - *Ironworks*
- 14 Perth - *Concert Hall*
- 15 Dunoon - *Queens Hall*
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- TUE 09 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
- THU 11 GUILDFORD G LIVE
- FRI 12 BRIGHTON CENTRE
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TUE 16 LLANDUDNO VENUE CYMRU THEATRE

- THU 18 NEWCASTLE O2 CITY HALL
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- WED 24 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL
- FRI 26 HULL BONUS ARENA
- SAT 27 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
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- FRI 03 BIRMINGHAM UTILITA ARENA
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BOOKS

SINÉAD O'Connor suggests she may have been channelling The Boomtown Rats when she decided to tear up a photo of the Pope in a high-profile *Saturday Night Live* appearance in 1992, her fellow Dubliners having shredded pictures of John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John on a 1978 edition of *Top Of The Pops*. In more deferential times, her bid to highlight clerical child abuse in Ireland seemed like an act of career suicide, but the way she puts it in her loose-slung memoir **Rememberings**, it was actually the moment when she took back control. "Having a No 1 record derailed my career and tearing the photo put me back on the right track," she explains.

A punky kleptomaniac whose upbringing was scarred by her mother's mental health issues (and death in a 1985 car accident), O'Connor's extraordinary voice saved her from a life of waitressing and kissograms. However, she bridled against the demands of the pop business from the off; ahead of the release of her 1987 debut album *The Lion And The Cobra*, she refused to take the big hints being dropped about terminating her pregnancy and responded to a request to dress more conventionally by shaving her head. "I looked like an alien," she writes proudly. "Didn't matter what I wore now."

She then ignored label warnings that 1990's intensely personal *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* would "end up like Terence Trent D'Arby's second album, gathering dust in a warehouse", but "cried like a child before the gates of hell" after discovering (while sitting on the toilet) that the LP and its cover of Prince's "Nothing Compares 2U" were topping the US charts. Tough but vulnerable, O'Connor went through the mangle thereafter and allies were hard to find. Prince was a monstrous, controlling creep when he invited her to his mansion, while she says Peter Gabriel treated her as "weekend pussy". She reveals, absent-mindedly, that she attempted suicide on her 33rd birthday, and admits that heavy weed smoking and a traumatic 2015 hysterectomy has wiped out many memories of subsequent years.

However, if *Rememberings* is not comprehensive, O'Connor explains her self-destructive urges with a disarming humour (and plentiful scatological detail). Now 54, the one-time hate figure's spiritual quest has led her to retrain so she can work in end-of-life healthcare between tours. No friend to the Vatican, but on the side of angels.

INTRODUCED to the New York Factory set by Rolling Stone Brian Jones, Nico was crowned "Miss Pop 1966" by Andy Warhol. However, The Velvet Underground were less than thrilled when the Cologne-born model and star

"I looked like an alien": Sinéad O'Connor in the Netherlands, 1989



REVIEWED THIS MONTH



REMEMBERINGS
SINÉAD O'CONNOR
PENGUIN SANDYCOVE
£20
8/10



YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL AND YOU ARE ALONE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF NICO
JENNIFER OTTER BICKERDIKE
FABER, £20
7/10

of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* was foisted on them as a guest star for their debut album. "Singing in tune was the first objection that was brought up," remembered John Cale. "But then we didn't play in tune."

Nico was a powerful and strange performer, but cultural historian Jennifer Otter Bickerdike is keen to upturn the singer's typical portrayal as a heroin-addicted hanger-on in her expansive

O'Connor bridled against the demands of the business

biography **You Are Beautiful And You Are Alone**, which scrapes away decades of "misogyny and stereotyping" to reveal something of the woman behind the cheekbones.

Born Christa Päffgen, Nico rebranded herself in the 1950s when she became a catwalk star, and had a child by Nouvelle Vague bad boy Alain Delon before crossing the Atlantic. After her brief Velvets spell, she made a lightweight solo record, *Chelsea Girls*, but was inspired by Jim Morrison and Ornette Coleman to tack

towards her natural sound, the funereal dirges of 1968's *The Marble Index*. For one Warhol hanger-on, it was "the sound of an amplified moose". Producer Cale noted: "*The Marble Index* isn't a record you listen to. It's a hole you fall into."

Desertshore (1970) and *The End* (1974) were similarly grave, and while Nico was fetishised by art rockers and post-punk ghouls, her drug use left her living in reduced circumstances in Manchester in the 1980s (a situation immortalised in James Young's fabulous book *Songs They Never Play On The Radio*). The queen of the goths eventually got clean, but died in 1988, aged 49, following a heat-induced cycling accident in Ibiza.

Otter Bickerdike battles hard to bring light to the darker corners of Nico's story; she busts myths, tracks down documents and tries to explain the singer's motivations – not easy when it comes to the time when Nico casually glassed a Black Panthers associate in a New York bar. Associates attest to Nico's intelligence and shyness, but she remains a distant presence; always a less-than forthcoming interviewee, Nico never opened up about her supremely nebulous songs, and didn't even give that much away in her personal diary.

"She was mysterious and European," Warhol wrote of her. "A real moon goddess type." For all the excellent research in *You Are Beautiful And You Are Alone*, that's about all we know for sure. **JIM WIRTH**

FILMS

Mesmerising period drama, the perils of narcissism and a deranged comedy with “killer style”

WHITE ON WHITE
W Not many performers in today's cinema can approach the mesmerising strangeness of

Klaus Kinski in his prime, but Alfredo Castro is one of them. The Chilean actor made his international breakthrough as the lead in two films by Pablo Larrain – playing a disco-dancing sociopath in 2008's *Tony Manero* and a morgue worker caught up in the horrors of the Pinochet years in *Post Mortem* (2010). More recently, his supporting role as a celebrity detective in Argentinian film *Rojo* proved that Castro is one of those actors who can just quietly stroll into a film midway and set your nerves tingling with a sense of irreducible danger.

Castro is in muted mode, but no less galvanising, in *White On White* – a period drama by Chilean-Spanish director Théo Court. He plays Pedro, a photographer who visits an estate in a remote snowbound stretch of Tierra Del Fuego on the cusp of the 20th century. He has been commissioned by a powerful absent landowner named Mr Porter to photograph his pre-teen bride-to-be Sara (Esther Vega). But when Pedro's interest in the girl breaks its agreed boundaries, he finds himself trapped in Porter's desolate house, echoing with creaks, footsteps and the sound of drunken disorder, and forced to take part in his host's terrible project – the systematic extermination of the local indigenous Selk'nam people.

With cinematographer José Alayon mapping the surrounding terrain, from bleached-out snowscapes to parched deserts – as well as the distressed chambers of the Porter mansion, every interior a haunted theatre tableau – *White On White* is at once realist and eerily dreamlike. Along with Castro, there's strong support from Lola Rubio as enigmatic housekeeper Aurora, while Lars Rudolph, best known as the wild-eyed lead of Bela Tarr's *Werckmeister*



Passionate and powerful: Luca Marinelli and Denise Sardisco in *Martin Eden*

Harmonies, turns up in in absolute unbridled form as Porter's mercurial right-hand man – which essentially means you get two Klaus Kinskis for the price of one. The reference to Kinski isn't gratuitous: in its eerie atmosphere and profound weirding of the colonial past, *White On White* is one of the few recent films to approach the troubling ghostliness of Werner Herzog's great history films of the '70s and '80s (*Kaspar Hauser*, *Aguirre* et al). At once landscape study and historical horror story, this is a mesmerising essay on the secret history of early photography, and implicitly on the hidden violence of cinema.

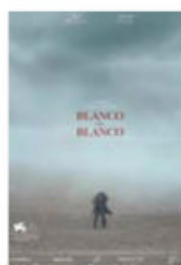
MARTIN EDEN This sumptuous costume adaptation of the 1909 novel by US writer Jack London comes from the last place you'd expect: the shores of the Italian avant-garde. Director Pietro Marcello made his name with films of an experimental nature – including *Lost And Beautiful*, a hybrid documentary about the fate of Italy's rural culture and in which a commedia dell'arte clown trekked across the nation in the company of a rather forlorn buffalo. In similar vein, *Martin Eden* is anything but a straightforward literary

adaptation – jumping between decades in the 20th century, the narrative spiked with inserts of archive footage, as much dreamlike as strictly documentary.

Jack London's story, originally set in California, is about a young working man who dreams of literary success, inspired by the middle-class girl he falls for. Here the story is transplanted to Italy, with Martin played by the strapping Luca Marinelli, who looks like a simmering movie heartthrob from a bygone era. As Martin struggles to find his voice – and engages in debate about the socialist politics of his time – Marcello confronts the novel's romantic pessimism with the historical realities of a century that London himself never knew. Ample play with anachronism makes *Martin Eden* into a compendium of Italian film history, variously channelling Visconti, Bertolucci and Pasolini. Sometimes elusive but always powerful, this is a work of passionate, polemical beauty from a director who is a genuine original.

SWEAT Theoretically, *Sweat* is as zeitgeisty as they come – although, given how quickly things change in the strange

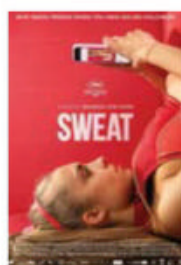
REVIEWED THIS MONTH



WHITE ON WHITE
 Directed by Théo Court
 Starring Alfredo Castro
 Streaming from June 30
 Cert To be confirmed
8/10



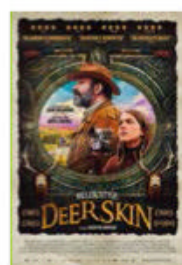
MARTIN EDEN
 Directed by Pietro Marcello
 Starring Luca Marinelli, Jessica Cressy
 Opens June 4
 Cert 15
8/10



SWEAT
 Directed by Magnus von Horn
 Starring Magdalena Kolesnik
 Opens June 25
 Cert To be confirmed
6/10



THE REASON I JUMP
 Directed by Jerry Rothwell
 Opens June 18
 Cert To be confirmed
7/10



DEERSKIN
 Directed by Quentin Dupieux
 Starring Jean Dujardin, Adèle Haenel
 Opens July 16
 Cert 15
7/10



Martin Eden is as much dreamlike as strictly documentary

Jestina from Sierra Leone, whose parents successfully fought prejudice to set up a school for children like her; and lifelong friends Ben and Emma, from the US, whose have spent years unable to communicate fully until speech therapy enabled them to express their feelings and experiences.

Rothwell both shares the biographical details of their lives and also uses impressionistic techniques to convey a sense of how people with autism negotiate a daily flood of details. Novelist David Mitchell, himself the father of an autistic child, co-translated Higashida's book and talks here about it as being like a message from another world with different rules. Rothwell's emphasis on impressions – textures of fabric, shifts of light, rainwater on glass – sometimes gives the film a slightly soft, vaporous tone, though overall it manages to avoid preciousness and sentiment. *The Reason I Jump* is moving, but more importantly it is revealing and insightful. You emerge from it with a sense of how those different rules work – and how the film's subjects work with them, tenaciously and creatively.

DEERSKIN Quentin Dupieux once traded as a techno artist under the name of Mr Oizo – you might remember his 1999 hit “Flat Beat” and its video's then-inescapable puppet Flat Eric. Since then he's carved out a transatlantic career as the director of extremely bizarre, sometimes one-joke comedies – such as *Rubber*, in which the rampaging killer is a rubber tyre.

Deerskin – which promises to be Dupieux's long-awaited breakthrough outside his native France – is his most controlled and affecting conceit yet. Jean Dujardin (*The Artist*) plays Georges, a man who stakes his entire life on the purchase of a secondhand buckskin jacket, then lurks around a quiet French mountain region pretending to be a filmmaker (largely because the jacket's seller threw in a video camera as a free bonus). But as the garment takes on a controlling personality of its own, Georges' guerrilla movie becomes increasingly deranged.

Against all odds, a seemingly slender and preposterous idea pays off for several reasons. Firstly, Dupieux treats the premise as seriously and matter-of-factly as Georges treats his own narcissistic obsession. Secondly, the performers are game: few comic actors can do self-regarding cluelessness as well as Dujardin, while arthouse regular Adèle Haenel is quite superb as his foil, an aspiring movie editor who humours and enables his folly. Then there's the bizarrely limited colour palette: Dupieux's own photography makes the whole film look as if it's shot in shades of buckskin. A minor, left-field pleasure, yet with – as Georges purrs, admiring himself in the mirror – “killer style”. 🍷

JONATHAN ROMNEY

universe of influencers, this 2020 Polish drama may already come across to insiders like a document of the distant past. For most of us, however, Magnus von Horn's film scrupulously dissects a very current social condition – the obsessive self-promotion of online personality. Magdalena Kolesnik plays Sylwia, a fitness guru who peddles her own brand of relentless hey-wow positivism and personal perfection but whose personal life is detached and dissatisfied. *Sweat* shows what happens when reality – with all its discomfort, imperfection and pain – crashes into the carefully constructed fantasy life.

You can see the pitfalls of telling a story such as this: *Sweat* could have been moralising and judgemental, or opted to punish its anti-heroine for superficiality. Instead, Von Horn takes us inside Sylwia's glossy personal microclimate, shows us the daily work she does to maintain the image, then looks at the world of imperfection that she's trying to escape: a visit to her mother's flat offers a mundane contrast to the screaming pink and neon that cloak much of the film. A streak of studious earnestness is offset by passages of furious energy, a mounting sense of unease and by a terrific lead from Kolesnik, who brings out the vulnerability, intelligence and basic humanity beneath all of Sylwia's anxious narcissism.

THEREASON I JUMP Jerry Rothwell's documentary takes its title from 13-year-old Naoki Higashida's memoir – a groundbreaking candid account of the author's autism. Rothwell's film takes Higashida's insights as the frame for a much broader study of several young autistic people from around the globe. Amrit, from India, turns her perceptions into distinctively styled paintings; Joss, from the UK, hears music in the subliminal hum of electric transformer boxes;

ALSO OUT..

IN THE HEIGHTS

OPENS JUNE 18

Musical from *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, concerning the struggles of a bodega owner in New York's Washington Heights. Jon M Chu (*Crazy Rich Asians*) directs.

NASHVILLE

OPENS JUNE 25

Unmissable revival of the 1975 country music classic directed by Robert Altman, which took his ensemble style to delirious polyphonic levels. The satirical pile-up features Jeff Goldblum, Keith Carradine, Shelley Duvall and Geraldine Chaplin.

ANOTHER ROUND

OPENS JULY 2

Delayed from last year, Danish director Thomas Vinterberg's Oscar-winning latest features Mads Mikkelsen as a teacher who investigates the theory that life is better on slightly more booze.

JUMBO

OPENS JULY 9

Noémie Merlant (*Portrait Of A Lady On Fire*) stars in this eccentric European drama about objectophilia, as a young woman who develops a sexual passion for a fairground ride.



Johansson and Pugh in *Black Widow*

BLACK WIDOW

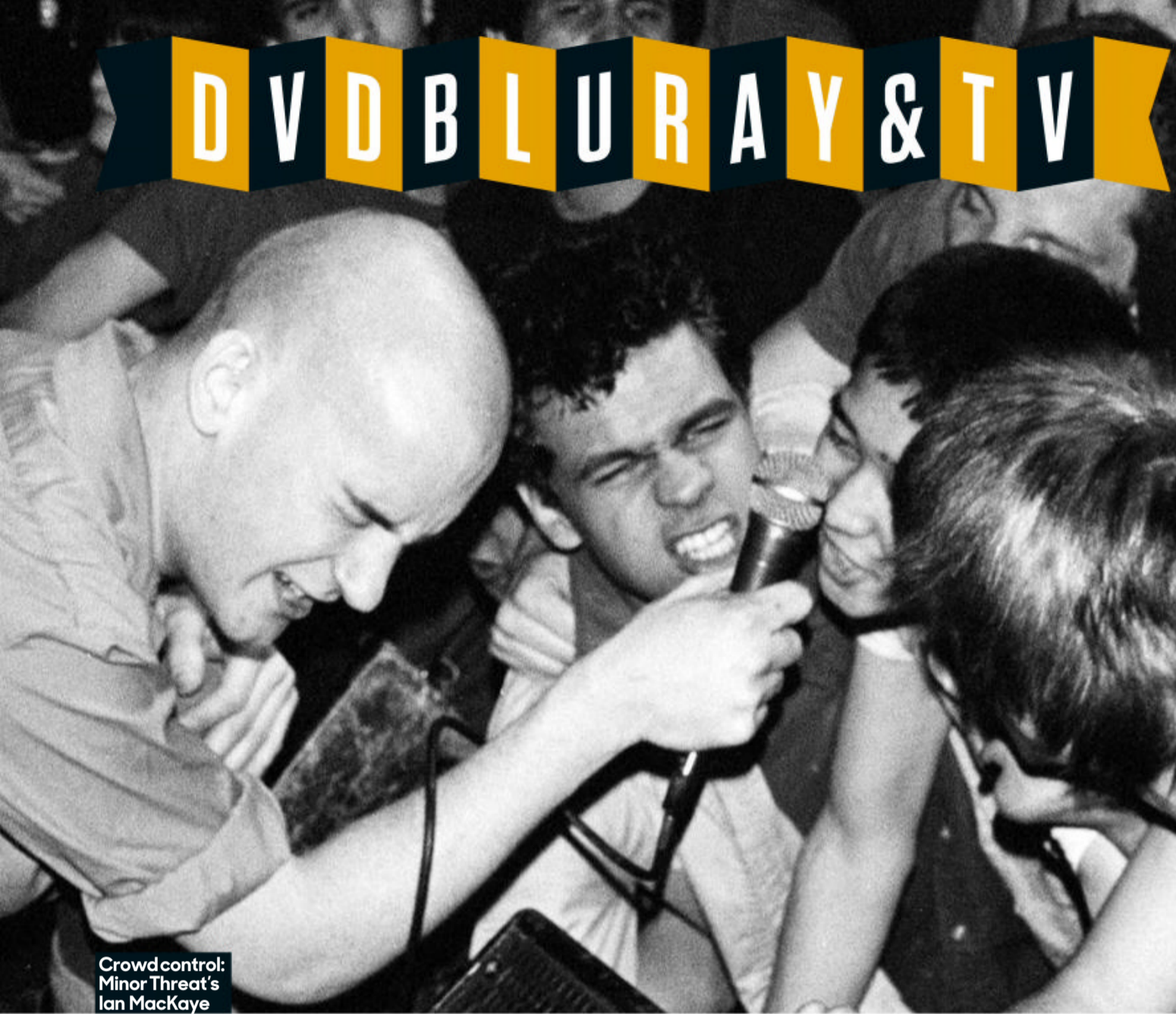
OPENS JULY 9

After a year's respite from superhero wham-bam, the Marvel machine gears up once again, with Scarlett Johansson as the Russian-born Avenger, alongside Florence Pugh, Rachel Weisz and David Harbour (*Stranger Things, Hellboy*).

THE WITCHES OF THE ORIENT

OPENS JULY 16

Idiosyncratic documentary about the Japanese women's volleyball team that took the '60s by storm. Jason Lytle and Portishead feature on the soundtrack.



Crowd control: Minor Threat's Ian MacKaye

PUNK THE CAPITAL: BUILDING A SOUND MOVEMENT

WIENERWORLD

8/10

The real MacKaye: fab retrospective of punk rock in Washington, DC, 1976–84.
By Jim Wirth



AS they bickered throughout the final days of Minor Threat, drummer Jeff Nelson told singer Ian MacKaye that – as unwashed jocks from the 'burbs started to infiltrate their well-marshalled scene – he wasn't really enjoying playing with the DC hardcore giants any more. Righteous fire forever burning in his eyes, MacKaye replied: "It's not supposed to be fun."

Packed with great footage and interviews, James June Schneider and Paul Bishow's excellent doc on the evolution of Washington, DC's mutant strain of punk shows how a teenage passion morphed into a full-on crusade. The comic-store nerds and Clash copyists who first thrashed out tunes at The Keg ("a heavy metal dump next to a strip bar", so says the Slickee Boys'

Howard Wuelfing) in the late '70s were crowded out by shaven-headed, middle-class hellions seeking a riot entirely of their own.

DC was a musical hinterland in the 1970s, with foundational punk acts such as Overkill and father-and-son shock-rockers White Boy (Google with care) pairing ripped T-shirts with flares and long hair as they sought new ways to tell the world that disco sucked. However, that tiny world began to expand when

The main protagonists were young hotheads with a vision

Bad Brains – black, jazz-fusion heads inspired by "positive mental attitude" self-help guru Napoleon Hill's 1937 manual *Think And Grow Rich* – heard the Sex Pistols and the Dead Boys and decided that they could do it better.

"We listened to the Ramones and The Damned and we said, 'Well, they're jumping so we're gonna jump too, but we gotta be able to jump higher, quicker,'" remembers guitarist Darryl Jenifer. They raised the musical tempo as well. As Jenifer puts it: "If the Ramones think they're playing fast, watch this."

High-energy footage confirms Bad Brains' reputation as a life-altering live band, but if their departure for New York – and back-flipping singer HR's subsequent mental health issues – was a setback for DC, the baton was taken up by Woodrow Wilson High School classmates MacKaye and Nelson. Their first band, the Teen Idles, achieved moderate local success before splitting in 1980. With the final \$600 in their band account, they made a record. The first release on their Dischord label, it was the start of a campaign to define and document

an inward-looking Washington sound, unsullied by the need for critical approval they perceived in nearby New York. As Nelson puts it: "When you're working in isolation, sometimes you come up with the best stuff."

Nelson and MacKaye's next act proved that – as important as Black Flag or Ramones in defining the evolution of the US underground, Minor Threat were lightning fast, with killer shout-along choruses. When future Black Flag singer and DC scenester Henry Rollins saw their first shows, he thought: "Finally we have our Beatles."

Minor Threat also had a message. Annoyed at the Sid Vicious-style "self-destructive junkie culture" prevalent in punk circles, MacKaye evolved an aggressively wholesome no-alcohol, no-drugs, no-casual-sex ethos, which Minor Threat espoused in songs such as "Straight Edge" and "Out Of Step". Footage of a topless MacKaye inviting audience participation at one gig shows how effectively he got that across.

Punk The Capital perhaps downplays how obnoxious and violent MacKaye and his crew were at this messianic peak, but it shows how increasingly intense male bonding at gigs fractured the once small, supportive, women-friendly DC scene. Headcases, misogynists and white supremacists entered the moshpit, while MacKaye's ascetic values seeded more intolerant scenes in Boston, New York and beyond. Determined anti-careerists, Minor Threat got out while they were up, dissolving along with the other key Dischord bands – SOA, Faith et al – to regenerate into a next wave of less didactic DC acts: Rites Of Spring, Dag Nasty, and MacKaye's Embrace and Fugazi.

The wealth of great video footage in *Punk The Capital* underlines what made DC hardcore unique; the main protagonists were not marginal dropouts, as they were in New York and California, but the well-heeled, eloquent children of admirals, diplomats and journalists, with the will and means to succeed without outside support. They were young hotheads with a genuine vision; abrasive but, in their determined rejection of lax values and espousal of DIY thrift, as American as the Mayflower. "It wasn't a dress-up thing," says the still saintly MacKaye. "We were going to live it." Not fun: fundamentalism.

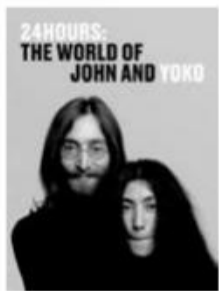
Extras: 7/10. Plentiful bonus mini-features, including dedicated pieces on Void, the Slickee Boys and Foo Fighter Dave Grohl's first band, Scream. **JIM WIRTH**

24 HOURS: THE WORLD OF JOHN & YOKO

CODA COLLECTION

7/10

A day in the life at the end of the '60s



Shot for the BBC in 1969, when writers and fans were already asking about The Beatles breaking up, this very short documentary follows John Lennon

and Yoko Ono as they do mundane chores: give interviews, discuss concert promotions, open mail, argue with journalists, laugh maniacally, drink tea, and launch what John calls “a very big advertising campaign for peace”. This documentary/art film (currently available via Amazon Prime Video in the States) simultaneously punctures and inflates their myth, offering an intimate portrait of the couple’s increasingly tense relationship with celebrity.

STEPHENEUSNER

DON'T GO GENTLE: A FILM ABOUT IDLES

DOC 'N' ROLL FILMS

7/10

Rowdy rock doc hits on mental health



Charting the rise of Bristolian emo-punks Idles over the past decade, Mark Archer’s concise, fast-paced documentary blasts along with some of the same explosively kinetic energy as the band’s riotous shows.

Interweaving live footage with soul-baring interviews, notably singer Joe Talbot on several wrenching family bereavements, *Don't Go Gentle...* also highlights the passionate online fan community AF Gang, who use Idles as a safe space to share their own mental and emotional struggles. Archer’s film is light on context or backstory but still a lively and engaging primer.

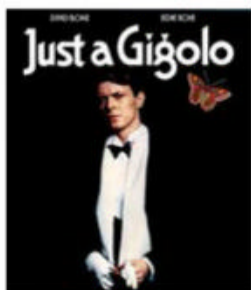
STEPHENDALTON

JUST A GIGOLO

SHOUT!FACTORY

5/10

Bowie's '78 flop, remastered



Deep into his Berlin phase, David Bowie took the role of a Prussian WWI soldier who hires on as a gigolo for wealthy widows. Directed by *Blow-Up*'s David Hemmings, the film

is a bizarre melodrama, featuring a stiff performance by its star and a cameo by Marlene Dietrich. Bowie later disparaged Hemmings’ film as “my 32 Elvis Presley movies rolled into one” – but it’s still an intriguing footnote for fans.

STEPHENEUSNER

Extras: 7/10. 32-page booklet, making-of featurette, audio commentary.



Indian metallers Parikrama; (below) director Abhimanyu Kukreja at the Beatles ashram in Rishikesh



LAST MAN STANDING

DOGWOOF

8/10

Nick Broomfield follows up Biggie & Tupac



Broomfield’s 2002 documentary suggested that Death Row CEO Suge Knight was responsible for the deaths of Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur. But with Knight safely imprisoned over another death, Broomfield hopes

that people might be more talkative this time round. There’s much less of Broomfield’s signature fourth-wall breaking than usual and this is a better film for it: the interviews furnish an intimate, terrifying portrait of the maelstrom Knight set whirling, and the lives it consumed.

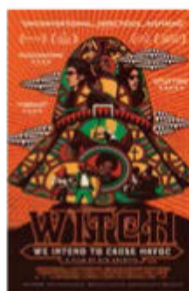
ANDREW MUELLER

WITCH: WE INTEND TO CAUSE HAVOC

BULLDOG FILM DISTRIBUTION

7/10

Zambian psychedelic gem unearthed



Gio Arlotta’s deep dive into Zamrock, the sub-genre of psychedelic rock that flourished in Zambia, focuses on Emmanuel “Jagari” Chanda, a quartz miner who bewitched audiences in the 1970s.

After a spell in jail and a religious conversion, Jagari is happy to revisit a musical career that encompasses a variety of influences, from blues, prog, and Osibisa-style funk to a less rewarding flirtation with disco. The effervescence of the recordings is undeniable, and Zambia’s Jagger is an engaging guide.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

ROCKUMENTARY: EVOLUTION OF INDIAN ROCK

STREAMING

7/10

Rock doc full of top bands but omitting much. By John Lewis



DOZENS of figures in pop history can claim Indian ancestry – from Freddie Mercury to Jaz Coleman, from Cliff Richard to Charli XCX – and many more have borrowed from Indian music and culture. But there has been scant record of the music that has actually emerged from India itself. This documentary – written, directed and co-produced by Abhimanyu Kukreja – is a fascinating and sometimes

infuriating attempt to redress this omission.

Western music has always occupied a curious position in India’s stratified, diverse cultural world. As this film explores, jazz music and dance bands were popular under the British Raj and in the decades after independence, usually with the millions of mixed-race Anglo-Indians and Goans who were scattered around the country’s big cities. A similar rock scene started to develop in the ‘60s, building up a diverse audience of Anglo-Indians, elite Indian teenagers from English-speaking private schools and also poorer people from Indian Christian communities who had developed a strong gospel tradition, particularly in parts of the north-east.

Kukreja tries his best to link these isolated and disparate scenes across Bombay, Bangalore, Madras, Calcutta and Shillong throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s. A host of articulate and fascinating interviewees explain how Indian radio stations after independence started to expunge western music from their playlists, leaving die-hard fans to get their rock fix from other sources – from the BBC World Service, the Voice Of America and radio stations in Sri Lanka and Burma. We hear about Iqbal Singh Sethi, “the Elvis of Bombay” who became a cult figure in the ‘50s; and about the Simla Beat competitions in the early ‘70s (rock festivals organised to promote a brand of cigarette). We hear how the local scene was influenced by every British rock group’s visit to India – The Beatles’ arrival in Rishikesh in ‘68, Led Zeppelin jamming in a shabby Bombay bar called Slip Disc in ‘72, The Police’s date at Bombay’s Rang Bhawan stadium in March 1980, and Iron Maiden’s 2007 Eddfest in Bangalore.

Some of the music here is brilliant – Mumbai psych-rock act Atomic Forest, the herky-jerky Madras rockers The Mustangs, and many of the contemporary heavy metal bands such as Indus Creed, Millennium and Parikrama. But Kukreja’s script needed a rigorous edit. He needlessly pre-empts interviewees, pursues blind alleys and endlessly repeats himself (there are at least three points in history that are dubbed “the golden age of Indian rock music”). And there are plenty of areas that deserve more investigation. Kukreja talks about Bollywood but doesn’t explore the rich varieties of rock created by Bollywood music directors such as SD Burman, RD Burman, Shankar-Jaikishan, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Kalyanji-Anandji, Bappi Lahiri or AR Rahman. Kukreja briefly touches on the rather touchy subject of Hindu sectarianism and the BJP in contemporary India, but never really explores what effect they have had on anglophone pop music. But what’s fascinating for western audiences is how utterly *un-Indian* most of this music sounds. For Indian musicians, Anglo-American rock’n’roll is the exotic. 🇮🇳

Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

ROGER HAWKINS

The kid from FAME
(1945–2021)

DRUMMER Roger Hawkins always insisted there was no great method to the Swampers' unique sound, only their embrace of complete freedom. "Nobody really suggested anything to play; we would interpret it," he explained to *Modern Drummer*. "Now that I look back at what we did, in addition to being musicians, we were really arrangers as well. It was up to us to come up with the part. That was the rule back then."

Alongside guitarist Jimmy Johnson, bassist David Hood and keyboard player Barry Beckett, Hawkins was a member of the crack session team, also known as the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, based at Rick Hall's FAME Studios in Alabama. The quartet backed a host of names on some of the most enduring soul and R&B classics of the '60s, among them Percy Sledge's "When A Man Loves A Woman", Aretha Franklin's "Respect" and "Chain Of Fools", Wilson Pickett's "Land Of 1,000 Dances" and "Mustang Sally" and Clarence Carter's "Slip Away".

Their reputation was such that work continued to pour in after the Swampers set up their own Muscle Shoals Sound studio in Sheffield, Alabama, in 1969. An increasingly eclectic list of clients included The Staple Singers ("I'll Take

Respected: Hawkins at FAME Studios, Alabama, 1968



You There"), JJ Cale, Paul Simon, Bob Seeger and Willie Nelson.

Hawkins first gravitated to percussion at church services in Mishawaka, Indiana, in his youth. Surrounded by country music, he and Johnson fell in love with R&B listening to the radio during trips to the University of Alabama to play frat parties with their first band, The Del Rays. "We didn't know how to do it, but we wanted to learn,"

he later recalled. "We also listened to a lot of Philadelphia, a lot of Motown, a lot of California, and tried to soak it up as much as we could." A major influence on his playing style was Booker T & The MG's drummer Al Jackson, from whom he learned how to build the rhythm of a soul ballad.

Deemed "the greatest drummer of all time" by Atlantic producer Jerry Wexler, Hawkins was inducted into the Musicians Hall Of Fame in 2008.

FLORIAN PILKINGTON-MIKSA

Curved Air original
(1950–2021)

In 1969, drummer Florian Pilkington-Miksa was recruited by Darryl Way and Francis Monkman for the five-piece Sisyphus, which soon morphed into Curved Air. He stayed for three albums, before joining Kiki Dee's band in the wake of 1972's *Phantasmagoria*. Pilkington-Miksa briefly returned two years later (vacating his spot for Stewart Copeland), but was part of Curved Air's major reunion of 2008.

DEWAYNE BLACKWELL

Veteran Nashville hitmaker
(1936–2021)

Vocal group The Fleetwoods topped the US charts in 1959 with "Mr Blue", written by Dewayne Blackwell and later covered by Bob Dylan and The Band during *The Basement Tapes*

sessions. Blackwell subsequently moved to Nashville, where his songs were recorded by Marty Robbins, Conway Twitty, Porter Wagoner and Garth Brooks, who scored a major hit with 1990's "Friends In Low Places".

BJ THOMAS

Country-pop crossover
(1942–2021)

Billy Joe Thomas first tasted success when his version of Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" made the *Billboard* Top 10 in 1966. The singer enjoyed a second million-seller two years later, with "Hooked On A Feeling", though he's best known for Bacharach and David's Oscar-winning "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head", from *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*.

NICK KAMEN
'80s pop culture icon
(1962–2021)

Having shot to fame through his

stripped-down appearance in a Levi's television ad, model Nick Kamen embarked on a solo music career with 1986's "Each Time You Break My Heart", co-written and co-produced by Madonna. The song made the UK Top 5 and became a major international hit, followed up with a cover of The Four Tops' "Loving You Is Sweeter Than Ever".

LEW LEWIS
Ardent '70s rocker
(1955–2021)

Influenced by Little Walter, harmonica player and singer Keith "Lew" Lewis grew up alongside Canvey Island neighbour Lee Brilleaux. They played together in the Southside Jug Band, with Lewis going on to record with Eddie And The Hot Rods and, in 1976, sign a solo deal with Stiff. He made numerous appearances elsewhere, including The Stranglers' "Old Codger" and The Clash's *Sandinista!*.

CURTIS FULLER

Jazz Messenger
(1934–2021)

Jazz trombonist Curtis Fuller began with Yusef Lateef's quintet in the late '50s, during which time he also recorded with John Coltrane (*Blue Train*), Art Farmer, Jimmy Smith, Hank Mobley and others. *New Trombone*, the first of over a dozen albums as leader, was issued on Prestige in 1957. Fuller joined Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers four years later, remaining with them until 1965.

FRED DELLAR

Learned music journalist
(1931–2021)

Long before the internet, Fred Dellar was the closest thing to a definitive pop database. His extraordinary wealth of knowledge, allied to an unflinchingly generous personality, saw him employed by *NME* (where

LLOYD PRICE

Rock'n'roll pioneer
(1933–2021)

LLOYD Price had barely turned 19 when he recorded “Lawdy Miss Clawdy” in March 1952. Produced and arranged by Dave Bartholomew at New Orleans’ J&M Studio, with bleating sax and Fats Domino’s rolling piano triplets, the song became a keystone of early rock’n’roll, its impact heightened by Price’s anguished cry. “Lawdy Miss Clawdy” predated Little Richard, Jerry Lee and Elvis, who was so impressed that he cut it himself four years later.

Price’s original version for the Specialty label, inspired by a catchphrase from local DJ James “Okey Dokey” Smith, topped the Billboard R&B chart that spring, selling close to a million copies and making him a crossover sensation. “I revolutionised the South,” claimed Price at his Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction in 1998. “Before ‘Lawdy Miss Clawdy’, white kids were not really interested in this music.” Whenever he played at segregated venues, he’d observed, black and white kids would rebel by dancing together.

Price charted with further hits, though momentum was lost when he was drafted into the US Army in Korea. On his return, Specialty had signed Little Richard, albeit at Price’s suggestion. He responded by co-founding his own KRC label for 1957’s “Just Because”, hitting gold two years later with dramatic murder ballad “Stagger Lee”, which made No 1 on both the Pop and R&B listings. More hits followed before the ’50s were out, chiefly “I’m Gonna Get Married” and the exuberant “Personality”, which duly gave rise to his “Mr Personality” nickname.

As his star began to wane in the early ’60s, the entrepreneurial Price and business partner Harold Logan set up Double L Records – signing Wilson Pickett in the process – and opened a New York nightclub. The following decade saw him branch out further, helping promote boxing fights with Don King, most notably two historic heavyweight bouts involving Muhammad Ali: 1974’s “Rumble In The Jungle” in Kinshasa and the following year’s “Thrilla In Manila”. He and King even formed the LPG label, marking Price’s last recording of note, “What Did You Do With My Love”. In 2011, keen to assert his role in the evolution of popular music, Price published a memoir, *The True King Of The Fifties*.



“Mr Personality”: crossover sensation Price circa 1960

his duties included the “Fred Fact” column from the ’70s onwards), *Smash Hits*, *Vox*, *Loaded* and more. Dellar also authored several books, among them the comprehensive *NME Guide To Rock Cinema*.

CHRIS NEWMAN
US alt. rock influencer
(1953–2021)

Portland singer-guitarist Chris Newman helped clear the path to grunge with his potent brand of distorted psych-blues during the 1980s, chiefly with Napalm Beach. More recently, he formed three-piece outfit Boo Frog and headed up the prolific Chris Newman Deluxe Combo. Mark Lanegan described him as “my first musical hero... If I could’ve sung like anyone it would have been him.”

BOB KOESTER
Label founder and producer
(1932–2021)

Jazz and blues aficionado Bob Koester founded Delmark Records (initially Delmar) in St Louis in 1953. Five years later he moved to Chicago, where he also opened the Jazz Record Mart, the city’s destination for serious collectors. A Blues Hall Of Fame inductee, Koester recorded hundreds of artists at Delmark, among them Junior Wells, Sun Ra, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and Archie Shepp.

NORMAN SIMMONS
In-demand jazzier
(1929–2021)

Chicago jazz composer and arranger Simmons started out as pianist at the local Beehive Lounge, backing travelling greats like Charlie Parker and Lester Young. He debuted as leader with 1956’s *Norman Simmons Trio*, featuring bassist Victor Sproles and drummer Vernel Fournier, and went on to record with Carmen McRae, Roy Eldridge, Betty Carter, Anita O’Day, Joe Williams and more.

PATSY BRUCE
Nashville songwriter
(1940–2021)

Distinctive anthem “Mammas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys” was initially a country hit for Ed Bruce, who co-wrote the song with wife Patsy in late 1975. Waylon Jennings’ and Willie Nelson’s cover, three years later, turned it into a country standard. The Bruces, alongside Bobby Borchers, also co-created Tanya Tucker’s big-selling “Texas (When I Die)”.

ALIX DOBKIN
New York folk activist
(1940–2021)

US folk singer Alix Dobkin began performing in Greenwich Village coffee houses in 1962. After a brief marriage to Gaslight Café co-owner Sam Hood, she became a major activist for women’s rights and feminism, forming Lavender

Jane with Kay Gardner for 1973’s lesbian-themed *Lavender Jane Loves Women*. Dobkin recorded a handful of solo albums and published a memoir, *My Red Blood*, in 2009.

PERVIS STAPLES
Staple Singers co-founder
(1935–2021)

Prior to joining his father Roebuck and sisters Mavis, Cleotha and Yvonne in The Staple Singers, Pervis Staples sang street corner doo-wop in Chicago with friends Sam Cooke and Lou Rawls. His tenor voice was key in the family’s emergent gospel-soul, though he bowed out after 1968’s *Soul Folks In Action*. He then managed girl group The Emotions.

CHIMODU
Hip-hop photographer
(1966–2021)

Described by Questlove as “an intricate part of the hip-hop renaissance”, photographer Chi Modu made his name with US rap magazine *The Source* during the ’90s. He shot album covers for Snoop Dogg, Mobb Deep, Method Man and more, while his most celebrated subjects included Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur, particularly the monochrome image for the sleeve of 2002’s posthumous *Better Dayz*.

CRAIG DUFFY
Much-loved road manager
(1962–2021)

Craig Duffy, who has died in a car

crash alongside his partner Sue Parmiter, counted Franz Ferdinand, Radiohead, Fugees, U2, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Madness and The Damned among his past clientele. His most enduring associations were with Duran Duran and (beginning in the late ’90s) Blur, which led on to solo Damon Albarn and Gorillaz.

JOHN DAVIS
The real Milli Vanilli
(1955–2021)

The lip-synching scandal that surrounded R&B duo Milli Vanilli revealed John Davis to be one of the actual lead singers on 1989’s mega-selling *Girl You Know It’s True* (first issued as *All Or Nothing* in the UK). Davis and fellow original vocalist Brad Howell then formed The Real Milli Vanilli, releasing a sole album, the wryly titled *The Moment Of Truth*, in 1991.

PATRICK SKY
East Coast maverick
(1940–2021)

A Greenwich Village folk staple, Patrick Sky’s 1965 debut album included “Many A Mile”, later covered by Buffy Sainte-Marie, Eric Andersen and Dave Van Ronk. His most controversial moment was 1973’s socio-political *Songs That Made America Famous*, delayed for two years owing to its explicit content. Sky, who also produced Mississippi John Hurt for Vanguard, later moved towards traditional Irish music. **©ROBHUGHES**

FEEDBACK

Email letters@uncut.co.uk.
Or tweet us at twitter.com/uncutmagazine

A CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Your excellent feature on Marianne Faithfull [June issue] stirred many memories – as I am also an ex-inmate of St Joseph's Convent in Reading! I was a year behind Marianne at the convent and was also taught English by Mrs Simpson to A-level. She was a classic grammar school English teacher – well qualified, experienced and effective – but she had a tough job from 1963–'66 when our ears were tuned to the lyrics of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. She found a way through, however, and inspired me, as well as Marianne, with the Romantic poets.

Marianne was certainly a known presence in the school by her fifth year. The quality of her voice had been recognised early on and the equally beloved Miss Bailey, our music teacher, worked with her. A year or two before she left, Marianne sang the solo soprano parts of the *Messiah* in a Christmas production – I was in the choir. Her voice was quite beautiful – strong and clear.

We were all desperate to get out from the convent and away from boring Reading, which then had minimal entertainment facilities. London was only half an hour away, and older girls found their way to parties there. When Marianne left school to make her first single we all admired the classy escape tunnel she had made for herself, although when I heard her voice on the record it seemed rather thin to me and not like the stronger voice I had heard live at school events. I have been very sad reading about experiences she went through over the years, but she has emerged as the ultimate survivor and an inspiration to a younger generation. I will look forward to hearing her new album – Mrs Simpson would have been delighted that her teaching had inspired her most famous student to create a new work of art.

Rock on, Marianne!

Alison Skinner, St Joseph's Convent 1959–'66

Amazing letter, Alison. Thank you so much for writing. [MB]

ALEX THE GREAT

Alex Paterson's choices for My Life In Music [July issue] were inspired! Being of similar age, the good doctor's selection reminded me of my own youth. T.Rex's "Get It On" was one of the first singles I ever bought



– and I still love the evergreen *Electric Warrior*. I also purchased Alice Cooper's *Killer* when first unleashed. I agree that the four classic Alice albums Alex mentioned are by far the group's best.

Bowie and Eno both go without saying – titans, especially during their '70s heyday.

King Crimson have always circumvented the prog label – my favourite album of theirs being the truly unique *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*.

With Kraftwerk's status as one of the most inspiring forerunners of electronic innovation and Prince Far I doing what he did best on *Under Heavy Manners*, that just left Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to bring up the rear – whose philosophy I can totally relate to. And, yes, we do all need a little bit of love after what we've experienced this past year or so. Hats off to the Orb man for his exceedingly good taste!

Pete Moore, Brighton

BOB'S FULL HOUSE

Well done, *Uncut*, for the brilliant Dylan At 80 feature. I'm not a massive Bob fan. So much so, I still maintain *Nashville Skyline* is his finest album, even though I gather it's not highly regarded by devotees. Nevertheless, I reckon...*Skyline* is probably one of

the greatest (and shortest) records of all time.

Anyway, when *Uncut* dropped on the doormat, I rolled my eyes when I saw Dylan was the cover star... yet again! But the feature turned out to be a revelation. The eyewitness reports from the multitude of people who have crossed his path over the years was a brilliant angle to tell the story from a new perspective. So hats off to the *Uncut* team for coming up with that idea and providing fresh insight on this iconic figure.

Stephen Hope, Glasgow

...Just a quick note to say thanks for a great magazine. Years ago I used to subscribe, but in 2009 I became a dad and so had other priorities. Only now do I find I have time to properly engage with music once more.

The album of Dylan covers drew me in. I thought I'd heard all possible treatments, but what a collection!

The interview with Stephen Stills also prompted me to revisit *Déjà Vu*, an album that I haven't listened to properly for years, and goodness, what a feast for the ears that is.

I've also sought out new music based on your reviews. It feels good to be back in the groove.

Jason Rose, Musselburgh
Good to have you back, Jason.

...I realise I've missed the boat for your July issue letters page; but regardless, praise where praise is due. I haven't purchased a copy of *Uncut* for some time (no reflection on the magazine itself), but still have cherished copies – including *Sounds Of The New West* CDs from back in the day. I decided I couldn't pass up on your June issue on such an occasion as celebrating Dylan's 80th and was looking forward to the read.

What I wasn't expecting was to enjoy the CD, as for me covers rarely improve on the original tracks. Well, I haven't stopped playing said CD! The interpretations are in most cases so different and unique compared with the original that it's been great to hear songs I know and love done in a fresh and inspiring way. I also discovered that I'd missed out on *Ambient Americana*. I'll be keeping my eye out for future issues now.

Thanks for your work.
Antony Taylor, via email
Cheers, Anthony! High praise indeed.

...Just got my copy of the June Dylan issue today. The CD is an absolute gem. Wonderful interpretations of Dylan classics! Congratulations on a great job to everyone involved in this project. This CD is a keeper.

Andy Lachapelle, Plainville, CT



CROSSWORD

One of two copies of Rodrigo Amarante's Drama on CD



ARRAY OF SUNSHINE

Take 290. Finally an edition with no Dylan, Floyd, Neil Young or Paul McCartney. Much more like it and more representative of the vast array of artists you could be featuring. Well done. Keep it up, please.

Steven Leiper, via email

But Steven – we humbly believe that every issue of Uncut features a wide variety of music coverage, regardless of the cover artists. You'll have noticed by now that we have McCartney in this issue – but there's also Nirvana, Sly Stone, Sparks, Altın Gün, Angélique Kidjo, Amy Winehouse, Rodney Crowell, Grateful Dead, Rodrigo Amarante, Arooj Aftab and lots more besides.

PAST FUTURE PERFECT

BRAVO! Your *Ambient Americana* CD is brilliant! The music fits exactly with the rebirth of sombre relief the world needs now. Kudos to the staff in charge of compiling the songs. Here in America, *Uncut* represents the last vestige of music appreciation remaining on Planet Earth. Keep bringing us the future while respecting the past!

Craig Schwab, Glendale, NY

WELCH RAREBIT

Although I knew that Bob Welch had been in Fleetwood Mac, it was only on listening to the *...1969 To 1974* boxset that I realised the contribution he made over the five albums he was in the band. There were some great songs and a definite move towards the West Coast/AOR sound that would make them huge just a couple of years after he left. I just wondered if he might be worthy of an article. I've not seen anything written about him in the many issues of *Uncut* that I've read over the years

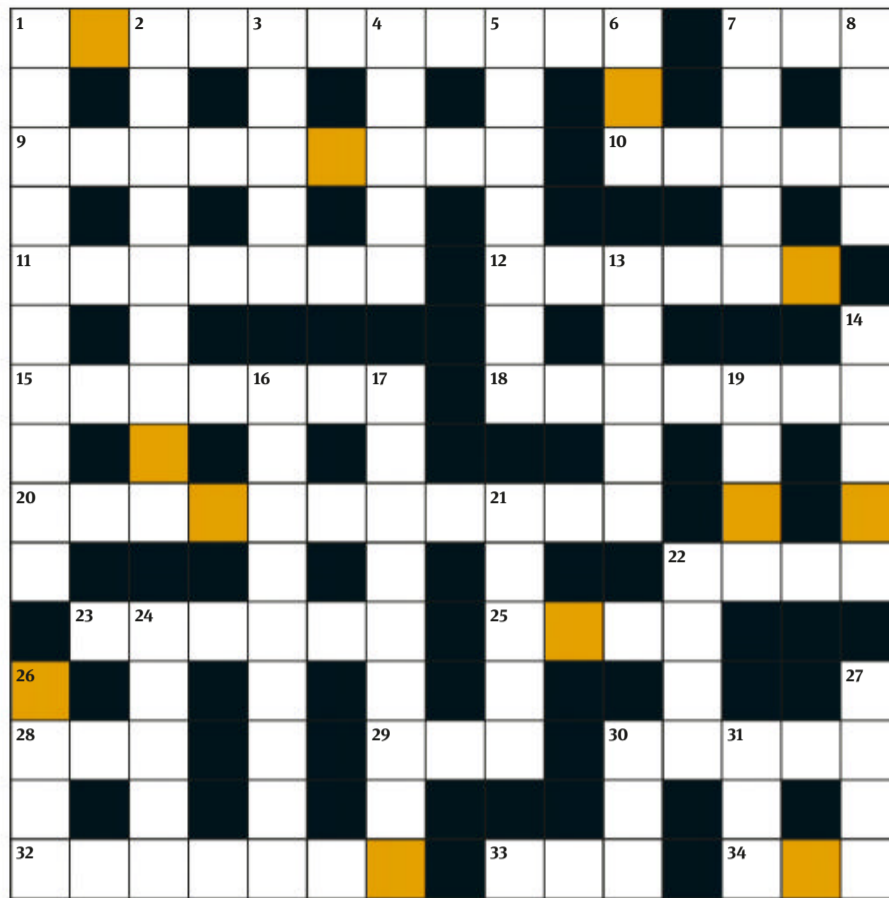
Nick Burke, Sheffield

Thanks, Nick. His work on Future Games and Bare Trees, particularly, is excellent – so an appreciation of his work is not out of the question.

RABBIT UP

I was wondering if you'd consider including the recent death of Rab McCullough in your next obituary section? Rab – who sadly passed away on Saturday, May 22 – was a legend in Belfast and further afield, a blues guitarist who played with many of the greats, including Van Morrison, Hubert Sumlin, Rory Gallagher and Jimi Hendrix – who, when speaking to Rab before their gig in Whitla Hall Belfast 1969, said, "Man, I don't know what you're saying, but I love the way you're saying it" – a reference to Rab's Belfast accent. Thanks for listening.

Ciaran Cunningham, via email



HOWTOENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Nirvana. When you've worked out what it is, email your answer to: competitions@uncut.co.uk. The first correct entry picked at random will win a prize. Closing date: **Wednesday, July 14, 2021**. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

- 1 I was wondering if you had any old stuff by Stereophonics. You do? No, I don't want to buy it, thanks very much (4-7)
- 7 (See 30 down)
- 9 A preprogrammed and unthinking album release from The Jesus And Mary Chain (9)
- 10+14 **D** Mate larked around to new Black Keys' music (5-5)
- 11 "I'm no dog, I'm a dolphin", 1990 (3-4)
- 12 (See 4 down)
- 15+30 **A** Billie Holiday song or record label for BBC's John Peel sessions (7-5)
- 18 Feeder's 21st chart single gave them their big break (7)
- 20 "Painted faces fill the places I can't reach/ You know that I could _____", 2008 (3-8)
- 23+22 **A** His Greatest Hits album in 2006 was titled *Why Try Harder* (6-4)
- 25 An album by The Sensational Alex Harvey Band is to follow immediately (4)
- 28 A single from Ed Sheeran (3)
- 29 (See 33 across)
- 30 (See 15 across)
- 32 Band that made "An Honest Mistake" (7)
- 33+29 **A** A performance from Chvrches? Leave this place now! (3-3)
- 34 Acclaimed film documentary of songstress who died in 2011 (3)

CLUES DOWN

- 1 "I was feeling insecure", 1971 (7-3)
- 2 I've got an early release from The Kinks (3-2-4)

- 3 West Indian dance to perform to a Throwing Muses album (5)
- 4+12 **A** Eagles album that edged its way into the charts (2-3-6)
- 5 US alt. rockers who asked on album *If Not Now, When?* (7)
- 6 "You know I didn't mean what I just said/ But my _____ woke up on the wrong side of his bed", from Oasis's "Little By Little" (3)
- 7 A throbbing beat on Pink Floyd album (5)
- 8 Album that is not the work of Squeeze (4)
- 13+21 **D** With or without preparation, The Fugees made it to No 1 (5-2-3)
- 14 (See 10 across)
- 16 Nibble one awkwardly with Arcade Fire (4-5)
- 17 All the people that made this a hit for Tommy Roe in 1963 (9)
- 19 Instrument of *Fear Inoculum* wielded by alt. metal band (4)
- 21 (See 13 down)
- 22 Arts movement providing song for Primal Scream (4)
- 24 Not quite stadium rock from Todd Rundgren (5)
- 26 "Lend Me Your _____". '50s song covered by The Beatles and included on *Anthology 1* album (4)
- 27 Remain in place for performances by David Bowie, Bernard Butler and Hurts (4)
- 30+7 **A** Music for the overweight dad from Paul Weller (3-3)
- 31 States this is an album by King Crimson (3)

ANSWERS: TAKE 289

ACROSS

- 1+9 **A** Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere, 11 Poet, 12 Lotus, 14 Tanx, 17 Dish, 19 Nut Rocker, 20+16 **A** Green Onions, 21 Legend, 23 Carnage,

DOWN

- 2+10 **A** Voices In The Sky, 3 Rain, 4+14 **D** Band On The Run, 5 Down Under, 6+32 **A** Keep Talking, 7 Odessa, 8 Stay, 9 Typhoons, 13 Encore, 15 Nice, 18 Skids, 22 Grace,

- 23 Catch, 24 Relax, 25 Alive, 26+33 **A** Eight Miles High, 27 Us, 30 AFI, 31 Ash

HIDDEN ANSWER
"Not Dark Yet"

XWORD COMPILED BY:
Trevor Hungerford

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My Life In Music

Jakob Dylan

The Wallflowers frontman reveals his greatest vinyl epiphanies and the songs that “completely ruptured my idea of rock’n’roll”



VARIOUS ARTISTS ROCKABILLY STARS VOLUME 1 EPIC, 1981

I discovered this when I was maybe 11 or 12 years old. It was a great introduction to that music – it has everybody from Mac Curtis to Carl Smith, Link Wray, but the highlight for me was Charlie Rich. He’s definitely one of the greatest singers I ever heard. His songs “No Headstone On My Grave” and “I Feel Like Going Home” completely ruptured my idea of rock’n’roll. It didn’t sound like old music at all, it sounded like brand new fresh music. The Clash, for one, were calling from that kind of music and it was nice to hear the history of it. I still have that same vinyl copy with me wherever I move to.



X LOS ANGELES SLASH, 1980

This was a very pivotal record. I knew as soon as I saw Billy Zoom playing a Gretsch guitar in a silver leather jacket that he was very much in line with that music [on *Rockabilly Stars*]. I don’t think you needed to get it to like X, but it made sense to me. At that time I was listening to a lot of English punk bands, but X were the quintessential Los Angeles band singing things that I more understood. They felt like a hometown band, even though I wasn’t old enough to go to their shows. Also John Doe was a great crooner, you could hear it hiding out in their music. Their harmonies were unlike anybody else’s.



BO DIDDLEY THE BLACK GLADIATOR CHECKER, 1970

It’s a very strange blues record, maybe the strangest blues record that I’m aware of. It’s an interesting precursor, possibly, to the bragging that you hear in hip-hop music. There’s a song called “Elephant Man” – it’s hard to make out the words, but I think he’s trying to suggest that he might have invented the elephant. Inventing a drumbeat is one thing, inventing an animal’s a whole ‘nother thing. The song “Shut Up, Woman” might be a little tough to listen to, but you’ve got to put it in context. It’s insensitive and misogynistic but it’s also humorous. It’s harder today to let those things fly, but I don’t think it’s meaning to hurt anybody.



THE STANDELLS “DIRTY WATER” TOWER, 1965

I have a fondness for this because it’s the first song I learned how to play while sitting in a room with other people. When you’re young and first starting out, you can’t be overwhelmed with rhythms or chord structures or the confines of what a song might be. You just need a song that everybody can get a grip on, and “Dirty Water” gives everybody a chance to dig into their instrument while learning how to play with other people. A lot of those garage bands didn’t last much more than a year, but they all sound good because they *got it* – you couldn’t do much wrong if you just followed the simple, barbaric rules of a couple guitars, bass and drums.



JUDEE SILL JUDEE SILL ASYLUM, 1971

This does not sound like somebody’s debut. Obviously she had a quite a history before making a record, from prostitution to drugs and jail time, and then arriving at being a songwriter. The writing gets mentioned quite a bit, but her singing is crazy to me. Most singers swoop to notes, but she hits notes right on the nose. Her melodies are overwhelming, they’re not simple at all. She was classically trained, which you can feel, but there’s nothing traditional about what she was doing – it just seemed very visceral and coming from a place she may not have been too aware of. She wasn’t around very long, so imagine what else she could have done.



LEE DORSEY “FREEDOM FOR THE STALLION” POLYDOR, 1971

A lot of people have taken a swing at this song, but Lee Dorsey’s version has always been my favourite. He’s allowed to bust through, but it’s also steeped in Allen Toussaint’s writing and arrangement, so you’re getting two in one there. It’s not unlike Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come”. Only the songwriter should say what a song is about, but it seems to me to be a metaphor for black persecution. Even if you don’t notice, it’s still a beautiful song, steeped in gospel chords. As simple as the refrain is – “*Oh Lord, you’ve got to help us find a way*” – you really feel it. That song has always touched me.



VAN MORRISON TB SHEETS BANG, 1973

That was a big punch, the first time hearing “TB Sheets”. I’m not gonna comment on what Van Morrison’s up to lately! I’ve heard, but I won’t let that infuse itself into what I think about some of his past material. “TB Sheets” still fascinates me. It’s not the most palatable song, it’s not “Brown-Eyed Girl”, but if it were all he ever did he would deserve a place in the hall of fame of songwriting. It’s a strange song; there really isn’t much structure to it. I think it’s one of the finest examples of his singing style – he is just riffing with his voice, like it’s another instrument. I don’t think he could sing any song twice and have it sound the same.



MINK DEVILLE CABRETTA CAPITOL, 1977

I loved that record. People didn’t know what to do with [Willy DeVille]. He seemed French, although he wasn’t. He had a Cajun, Tex-Mex style to his music. He kinda dressed like a pimp – he was quite a character. Another sad demise. His lyrics are very romantic and sometimes deviant and strange. It always felt to me like Lou Reed fronting The E Street Band: a very peculiar take on Americana, before that expression was really used. With my new record I’ve referenced him because it’s a way to do traditional American music without sounding dusty and rootsy. It’s not enough just to put a banjo on a song and say it’s steeped in history! 🎵

PHOTO: YASMIN THAN, INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS

The Wallflowers’ new album *Exit Wounds* is released on July 9 by New West



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